







WELLINGTON'S CAMPAIGNS

1808-15

ALSO MOORE'S CAMPAIGN OF CORUNNA

PART I

1808-9-10

*ROLEIA TO BUSACO*









# WELLINGTON'S CAMPAIGNS

PENINSULA—WATERLOO

1808-15

ALSO MOORE'S CAMPAIGN OF CORUNNA

(FOR MILITARY STUDENTS)

BY

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WITH SKETCH MAPS, AND PLANS.

PART I

1808-9-10

ROLEIA TO BUSACO

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## INTRODUCTION

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LECTURES delivered some years ago, at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, upon the operations of the Peninsular War, and subsequently revised and published\* after I had visited several of the battle-fields of Spain and the south of France, form the basis of a portion of these pages, which are now extended so as to include the campaign of Waterloo ; but what was then written has been since further revised, as of late years various histories, memoirs, and biographies have thrown additional light upon the events dealt with.

To a concise account—*i.e.* something more than a mere précis—of all the main operations, I have added a short explanation of certain simple principles of war, and of how these, and the topography of a country, must always materially influence the movements of troops conducted in it.

Full comments, designed especially for military students, and as an aid to the study of military history generally, are also given ; but I have borne in mind that there is no necessity to clothe these in too technical language, and that, in comments,

\* Under the title of *Strategy of the Peninsular War, 1808-14.*



it is wise to keep mainly to what has been said by critics who have the right to speak from knowledge and experience, especially the experience of war.

War is not an exact science. Unforeseen occurrences, and public interests other than military, frequently fetter every leader, for he is not only often compelled to act as he best can under surrounding circumstances, and not as he would choose, but must conform, if he is loyal, to the instructions of his Government and to the spirit of its policy. To decide justly, by mathematical diagrams and general rules, what he should have done, is not possible; and I may add here that these pages are drawn up upon the general principle that what is learnt by following a few important campaigns throughout, and examining the lessons they convey, remains, in all probability, more fixed upon the mind than what is acquired by first studying maxims of war, and then their illustrations, taken from detached incidents in very many campaigns.

With respect to battles, I have given briefly their distinctive character, adding outline sketches of the ground. To enter, except in a few special cases, into the part borne in them by particular divisions, brigades, and regiments, or to discuss the handling in combination of the "three arms" \*—

\* It is usual to speak of the "three arms"—artillery, cavalry, and infantry—but there is practically a fourth, the Engineers, who, under Wellington's general instructions, planned, traced, and supervised the famous lines of Torres Vedras in 1809-10, and were active throughout these campaigns.

matters which pertain to the very large subject of "tactics"—would be to attempt to do, and to do imperfectly, what, in its nature, is beyond the scope of this book. Any exhaustive examination into the details of Wellington's battles and sieges, from Roleia to Waterloo, would fill, not one volume, but several.

As a preparation, though, for such an examination, I have given the object with which each battle was fought; the chief commanders, and (in round numbers) the forces on each side; the general character of the positions taken up; the main features of the battle; its results; and the chief lessons taught by it, mentioning also the approximate losses suffered, and, as of interest, the medals, clasps, or battle-honours awarded for it.

The campaigns of Wellington teach British students some valuable lessons, which those between the armies of Continental nations cannot equally impart, because the former give the experience of British leaders, commanding British troops, carrying on war under a British military system and form of government, and yet usually in co-operation with other Powers, whose troops are not bound by the same conditions. They illustrate, in short, the circumstances and special difficulties which will almost always surround British officers in any European war in which they may be engaged.

They have contributed to raise the prestige and fame of British arms, and strengthen the Empire;

and they teach the value of sea-power, and a close accord between the Navy and the Army.

For these reasons they appear to form the best foundation for the study of military history by British officers and students. But, further than this, they were conducted by great Captains, under conditions which, not forgetting the advance of modern science, are still, with certain reservations, those of our own day.

All authorities of note, though differing in their view as to how far back soldiers should go in military history in order to gather from the past lessons applicable to the present, seem agreed in this, that from the period when the conditions of war compelled all organized armies to protect a long line of supplies—in other words, from the days of Wellington and Napoleon—the principles of moving armies, when beyond the range of modern weapons, have little, if at all, altered, though the manner of applying these principles may be different.

To illustrate what is meant :—

In the days of Wellington and Napoleon it was an accepted principle of war to carefully guard the line of communications (or supplies), *i.e.* the road by which stores, ammunition, and reinforcements reach the army; and to endeavour to threaten, and if possible, seize, that of the enemy. Napoleon wrote, in his *Maximes de guerre* :—  
“The most important secret in war is to make oneself master of the communications. . . One

ought never to yield up one's line of communication; but to know how to change it is one of the most skilful manœuvres of the art of war."

Now the above principles are as applicable to-day as when they were written; indeed, they become, as armies increase in size and require more munitions of war to render them efficient, more vitally applicable. We see commanders in our most modern wars, including those of the forces of Japan and Russia in Manchuria at the present moment, recognizing their truth and acting upon them, but we find no more clear and striking illustrations of their value than in the campaigns of Wellington and Moore. Moore, by his advance against Napoleon's communications in the campaign of Corunna in 1808, entirely altered the course of the war and frustrated Napoleon's plans; and by his change of communications from Lisbon to Corunna withdrew his army from the dangers which surrounded it. Wellington changed his own line of communication from Portugal to St. Ander, in the north of Spain, in 1813; and then, at Vittoria, paralyzed Joseph's army by seizing his line (through Bayonne), and capturing all his guns, stores, and treasure.

To explain in what the difference in the application of the above principles in Wellington's day and in our own consists, it may be said that it seems to do so mainly in this:—In Wellington's time the ability of a leader to defend any point of his own communications, or strike effectively at one

of his adversary's, depended upon his command of the sea, or—in cases where this did not enter—upon his and his opponent's distance in hours of march (*i.e.* in time) from such points.

Now, in the days of steam and electricity, it is just as much—indeed, more—influenced by the command of the sea; but less by mere distance than by the comparative mobility, and power of transmitting orders and of concentration, which one leader may have over the other, in the possession of railway lines, motor transport, and telegraphic or telephonic communication, etc.

When Sir John Moore changed his line of communication from Lisbon to Corunna in December 1808, it was the fact that England held command of the sea which enabled him to do so. When Lord Wolseley changed his line from Alexandria to Ismailia in the Egyptian campaign of 1882, the command of the sea and the co-operation of the fleet were as necessary to him as they had been to Sir John Moore. Both put in force the same principle of war. The results of the movement were in both cases great; but in the latter case, what the fleet could accomplish in a given time was to be calculated upon with more certainty than in the days of Moore, owing to the introduction of steam, while it was more difficult to keep the plan secret owing to the greater rapidity with which news is at the present day transmitted.

To take another illustration. Napoleon wrote,

“To operate from directions wide apart, and between which there is no direct communication, is a fault which generally leads to others” (though, he adds, that it may be occasionally necessary or advantageous). This, again, as a principle, may be said to be as applicable to-day as when it was written; but there is this difference, that now armies, separated by impassable obstacles or long distance, may yet be in constant communication by telegraph—aware of each other’s exact position, and the news which each has of the enemy. This greatly lessens the danger of their being attacked at a disadvantage.

But should the telegraph wire get out of order, or be cut—an occurrence which may at any time happen—they are, for the period it remains so, in much the same position as they would have been in the time of Napoleon.

Illustrations of this kind might be multiplied, and Sir J. F. Maurice writes,\* “A soldier who has never considered how, or why, Napoleon triumphed over his opponents, and when and why he failed, would have very little chance of solving aright the problems of a modern campaign.”

Wellington, and those trained in his school and in that of Moore—Hill, Picton, Cole, Beresford, Uxbridge, Colborne (Lord Seaton), the Napiers, John Jones, Fletcher, Burgoyne, Frazer, Dickson, Hew Ross and others, well-known names, some famous, in English story—were the contemporaries

\* *War*, by Sir J. F. Maurice

or adversaries of Napoleon and the soldiers of his school—Soult, Junot, Massena, Ney, Marmont, Kellermann, Milhaud, and others of much distinction—from 1808 to the final triumph of Wellington over Napoleon himself at Waterloo ; and this consideration is of itself a reason why British military students should study the campaigns of Wellington and Moore against Napoleon and his marshals, which remain to this day models for British soldiers.

In the larger histories of the Peninsular War, the more important British operations are mingled necessarily with minor ones, and with comparatively unimportant Spanish movements, which exercised little influence upon the issue of the struggle ; and the chief aim of these pages is to facilitate the study of the campaigns dealt with by bringing together from standard histories, especially from the brilliant volumes of Napier, all the main British operations, and adding full military comments, which in brief histories of the campaigns are often little entered into, and occasionally find no place.

In order to keep the maps and plans clear, necessary details alone have been inserted ; and wherever it has been seen that maps in standard works upon the war differ (as they sometimes do) upon any material point, reference has been made to the official Spanish and French Surveys.

# WELLINGTON'S CAMPAIGNS

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## THE PENINSULAR WAR (1808-14) IN PORTUGAL, SPAIN, AND SOUTH OF FRANCE

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### CHAPTER I

#### ORIGIN OF THE WAR

By the year 1807 the power of Napoleon I., Emperor of the French, was at its height. In a series of successful campaigns he had gained brilliant victories over Austria, Prussia, and Russia, and the whole continent of Europe stood in terror of his military genius, and of the immense armies which he led.

At this time England was the only powerful enemy actively opposed to him. Her navy, under Nelson, had two years previously almost completely destroyed the French fleet at Trafalgar; and Napoleon, without a fleet, being powerless to invade England, had formed the design of subjugating her by ruining her commerce. To this end he called upon other nations, upon pain of his serious displeasure, to close their ports against British vessels, and prohibited all commerce and communication with England.\* The European

\* Berlin Decree, November 21st, 1806.



powers stood in too great fear of Napoleon to openly oppose his wishes ; but Portugal—a kingdom well inclined towards England, and which carried on with her a very profitable trade—did not discontinue her intercourse with sufficient promptitude to satisfy the French Emperor.

Moreover, during the campaign of Jena in 1806, Napoleon had reason to suspect that Spain, though an ally of France, was not a sincere and true one. Towards these two countries, then—forming together what is termed the Spanish Peninsula—he felt much ill-will, and their suspected hostility towards himself began, for a military reason, to render him uneasy.

By referring to Map I. of the Peninsula and south of France (facing the Title-page), it can be seen that the Spanish Peninsula joins on to France. The French Emperor therefore considered, that if, when he was engaged in some war to the eastward of France, Spain and Portugal were to side against him, and unite with his great enemy England, he might be placed in an embarrassing position. Having now comparatively no navy, he could not attempt to prevent a British army from being landed upon any part of Portugal or Spain ; and this army, once landed, could unite with Spanish and Portuguese troops, and, marching in combination with them, attack France from the south, in which case he would have had enemies both in front and rear.

These considerations, joined to ambition, determined Napoleon to attempt the possession of the Peninsula ; and to gain his object he entered upon

a course of treachery which circumstances peculiarly favoured. Spain was at the time governed by Charles IV., an old and weak-minded King, the tool of an unscrupulous minister named Godoy, and upon openly bad terms with his own son, Ferdinand VII., and the country was much distracted by the quarrels continually going on between the party of the King and Godoy, and the party of Ferdinand. Having succeeded in bribing Godoy, Napoleon, through his influence, persuaded the King to enter upon a secret treaty with him (Treaty of Fontainebleau, October 27th, 1807). By this treaty, which was one of the blackest treachery towards Portugal, a French army was to be permitted to enter Spain; Spanish troops were to join it, and the combined armies were to seize upon Portugal, it being a condition that that kingdom should be subsequently partitioned between Spain and France, and that Godoy should have a principality in it.

A pretext for a rapid advance into Portugal had also been found in the following way. Napoleon, in August 1807, demanded from her, as proof of her friendship, a declaration of war against England, the confiscation of all British merchandise, and the arrest of British subjects. Portugal, through fear, did not refuse this proof, but she allowed herself to venture a remonstrance, and upon this simple remonstrance a French army was at once moved forward, and had crossed the frontier from France into Spain on its march towards Portugal a few days before the Treaty of Fontainebleau was signed.\*

\* Oman, *History of the Peninsular War*, vol. i. p. 7.

The general who led it (Junot) was instructed to say that he came in no hostile spirit towards the Portuguese, but was merely determined to carry out Napoleon's orders, that the British should be at once excluded from the country. Uncertain as to the real intentions of Napoleon, and dreading his power, Portugal made no resistance. The French then quietly occupied Lisbon, the Prince Regent of Portugal and his court having left the capital by sea for Rio Janeiro. The Spaniards soon entered and took possession of other parts of the country; the Portuguese army was partly disbanded and partly sent abroad; and the subjugation of Portugal became complete.

But the turn of Spain was only deferred. Napoleon having got one army into the Peninsula, obtained permission, upon the ground of supporting it, to move up another to the Spanish frontier at Bayonne.

The quarrels at the court of Spain between Charles and his son, and some tumults at Madrid, soon afforded him an excuse for interfering as a friend to restore tranquillity, and for bringing this second army into Spain; and the weak-minded King had been persuaded at his suggestion to send the flower of the Spanish army to the Baltic, nominally to prevent the Swedes and English from attacking the French communications in that direction. Madrid being thus peaceably occupied, more soldiers were poured in from France; the great frontier fortresses of St. Sebastian, Pampeluna, Barcelona, and Figueras, were skilfully but treacherously surprised; Junot, who had received secret

orders, disarmed by a stratagem that part of the Spanish army in Portugal; and Spain lay at the mercy of Napoleon, who now threw off all disguise, and placed his brother Joseph upon the Spanish throne.

In this way did the capital cities of both Spain and Portugal, and the principal strongholds of the whole Peninsula, fall without the slightest struggle into the hands of France.

The people of the conquered kingdoms, at first stupefied, soon turned furiously upon the French. Bloody insurrections broke out, and an appeal for assistance was made to England. She, at that time ever ready to resist Napoleon, and the policy of conquest and aggression which he represented, freely granted it; large supplies of arms and money were forwarded, and it was determined to send a British army into the Peninsula to assist the Portuguese and Spaniards to expel the French.

#### SELECTION OF POINT OF ATTACK

The events which we have narrated above were extended over several months, and it was not until July 1808 that the army set sail for the Peninsula. In the first instance, the Government directed it upon Lisbon and Cadiz. The question now arises of "*why* were these points selected as those to be first occupied?" To answer this question demands a knowledge, first, of the principles governing the movements of all organized armies; second, of the general military strength of the contending powers, and of the positions held in the Peninsula

## 20      MATTERS TO BE STUDIED

by the French; third, of the character of the country upon which the operations were about to be conducted.

Before going further, therefore, we shall devote a chapter to these essential matters, which should be studied by all those who read history from the point of view of military students.

## CHAPTER II

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### PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE MOVEMENTS OF ORGANIZED ARMIES

#### MILITARY STRENGTH, ETC., OF THE CONTENDING POWERS IN THIS WAR

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY OF MILITARY TOPOGRAPHY

#### TOPOGRAPHY OF THE PENINSULA

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#### LARGE ARMIES NOW USED IN WAR—IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THEM ASSEMBLED—NECESSITY OF DEPÔTS AND MAGAZINES, OF GOOD ROADS, OF GUARDING THOSE ROADS

THE fact that of two armies equally matched in every respect but that of numbers, the larger has clearly the advantage, naturally causes nations, when about to go to war, to raise as many soldiers as their resources will admit of; and in modern times powerful and wealthy nations have brought into the field enormous masses of men. But it is not sufficient to merely possess a large army; unless it can be *kept assembled*, be rapidly set in motion, and completely controlled, it is comparatively useless for warlike purposes.

If there are two contending forces, one of which can be moved upon an instant's notice, while the other cannot stir without much preparation, the former can evidently out-manceuvre the latter, and will pretty certainly defeat it.

Thus any cause which interferes with the mobility of an army is vitally detrimental to that army, and such a cause would be the absolute dependence for food upon the immediate country in which the troops might happen to be placed. It can be easily seen that the resources of any small district, in which, for purposes of war, a force of 50,000 or perhaps 100,000 men may be concentrated, must be often totally inadequate to supply, for any time, the required amount of sustenance. This will frequently be the case in a fertile and friendly district; in a barren or a hostile one, in which the crops have been destroyed or removed, it will certainly be so. An army placed in it without supplies of its own must either starve or disperse in search of food.

When dispersed its power of instant motion is gone. It must be collected together again before it can stir as a compact body; and if it has been dispersed in the neighbourhood of a well-organized enemy, its scattered portions are in danger of being beaten while isolated. For these reasons it is essential that the men of an army should not be left dependent for food upon the particular district or country wherein they are waging war. The nation which sends them out to fight her battles must forward it to them, though the commander of the army will, of course, economise his resources

by procuring food when practicable from his immediate neighbourhood.

These remarks, as to the necessity of sending forth food for men, apply with equal force to that of sending forage for horses and baggage animals. If they are not constantly fed the cavalry must cease to exist, and the guns and baggage could not be moved. An army must also be at all times ready to fight as well as move, and directly it runs short of ammunition it becomes half paralyzed as a fighting body. Moreover, a constant stream of recruits must be always on the road to join it, to supply the gaps in the ranks caused by battle and sickness; and hospitals in safe positions must be established to receive the sick. On account of considerations such as these, directly an army takes the field, one of the first proceedings is to form in convenient situations, near the theatre of operations,

### *Depôts and Magazines*

in which, subsequently, recruits on the way to it, and men invalided or sent back from it, may find shelter; and stores of all kinds may be accumulated and preserved.

These must be safe from the attack of the enemy by natural position, if possible; but when that is impossible, must be fortified to ensure their security.

The place from which an army, having taken the field, draws its resources, and from which it advances to make war, is called the "*Base*" of that army—because it *forms the foundation upon which*



*it stands.* Sometimes, though not usually, an army may have more than one base.

As the army advances, supplies must be brought nearer to it, and therefore other magazines closer in rear are formed, and thus its supplies always follow it at a convenient distance. To keep up such a stream of supplies, however, would not be possible for any time without the existence of

### *Good Roads*

between the army and its magazines. In bad weather, indifferent roads become impassable for the heavy artillery, and ammunition waggons, and ponderous trains which accompany an army. The army itself must also have good roads along which to march, otherwise no combined movement of the three arms could be made with any certainty, for artillery and even cavalry cannot move along the miry lanes, or across the fields which, perhaps, infantry might traverse.

We see, therefore, the importance of possessing a good road or line by which to communicate with the magazines—called in technical language the “*Line of communication with the base*”; and also a good road or line along which to move forward or operate, called the “*Line—or, if there are two or more roads, lines—of operation.*” Without these the arrival of supplies must be uncertain, and the army cannot march freely.

From what has been said as to the necessity of a constant stream of supplies, and of fresh men to fill up the losses caused by war, the importance of

guarding the roads by which these must arrive—*i.e.* the lines of communication—becomes apparent. Hence it is that, in war, a general who can place himself upon the road or roads by which an enemy's supplies are forwarded, and still more if he can remain there, has obtained a most important advantage, for unless his adversary can regain his line of supplies by beating him in battle, or has a second set of magazines in some other direction to fall back upon, he must soon become distressed for want of food, or (if pressed by him) short of ammunition. He also runs the risk of losing a quantity of valuable stores.

Therefore, in war, an army—both while marching and fighting—endeavours *to guard its communications with its magazines or base; and when it sees an opportunity, will try to threaten those of the enemy.*

Before closing this subject, it may be well to say that the above are simple rules of war laid down by all the great captains of modern times. Armies have occasionally marched to victory in spite of bad roads; and, when cut off from their supplies, have defeated the enemy in battle, and won campaigns: but this merely proves that pluck and energy will often emerge triumphant out of very great difficulties. It does not excuse the placing an army, through ignorance, where the chances are against it.

“Every general,” said Napoleon, “who loses his line of communication, is, according to the laws of war, worthy of death.”—*Maximes de Guerre de Napoleon.*

MILITARY STRENGTH, ETC., OF THE  
CONTENDING POWERS

*England* had not at this period more than about 80,000 men disposable for a war in Europe ; and of these, 30,000, collected from various quarters, were destined for the Peninsula. The rest of her forces were required for the defence of her colonies, or consisted of militia and volunteers organized for home defence.

*Spain* had suffered her regular army to be, to a great extent, weakened by the prompt action of Napoleon. At the time of the outbreak she had not more than some 70,000 troops in the country ; and these were but indifferently officered and badly organized. The people, however, were animated by a bitterly hostile spirit against their invaders, and were soon armed in great numbers, and enrolled into partially drilled bodies.

*Portugal* had but a very small army indeed available. But the spirit of the nation was good ; the local militia soon made excellent soldiers, and as the war continued, the Portuguese levies, trained and led by English officers, fought side by side with the troops of Great Britain, and rendered them a most efficient assistance throughout the operations.

*France* might have been termed a nation of soldiers. For many years she had been incessantly at war, and her armies were not only composed, in large part, of experienced and well-tried troops, but they were strong in the confidence produced by almost constant victory, and in the leadership

of renowned generals. Napoleon had at his disposal about 600,000 men, and of these he had before long despatched some 80,000 into Spain. The greater number had entered by Bayonne, occupied Vittoria and Burgos upon the high road to Madrid, all the fortresses upon the French frontier, and Madrid itself. From these positions they had advanced in several directions to crush the Spanish insurgents, and one French corps was marching in the direction of Cadiz—a point to be noticed, as its subsequent fate materially influenced the disposition of the British forces. The invaders, though successfully resisted in some of the cities (such as Saragossa and Valencia), had in general routed and subdued the insurgents, and Napoleon, considering all dangerous resistance quelled, had left for Paris. In Portugal Junot, whose army was some 25,000 strong, had for a time been hard pressed to put down the insurrection, and, after some bloody successes against the people, had yielded up parts of the country, but still retained possession, in force, of Lisbon, and of the fortresses of Elvas, Almeida, and Peniché.

Such was the situation of affairs about the time of the sailing of the British troops.

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY OF MILITARY TOPOGRAPHY

The natural features of the earth exercise a most important influence upon the operations of armies. They generally decide the nature and design of a campaign, for it can be readily seen that the

## 28 IMPORTANCE OF TOPOGRAPHY

existence and direction of mountain ranges and of rivers, or of impassable or even difficult ground, must frequently control the movements that can be made by the troops; they give, in fact, in a military sense, strength or weakness to a country. Artificial features enhance or lessen the importance of the natural ones, and therefore, while speaking of these latter, we must consider also the constructions—such as roads, bridges, and fortresses—which have been built either to overcome or to strengthen them. Before entering upon the study of any campaign, the country in which it was fought should be made the subject of careful consideration. The roads being good or bad, the rivers fordable or unfordable, navigable or the reverse, the position of fortifications and so on, are points of the greatest moment in war, and these details, as well as many others of importance, must be studied. Information upon military particulars of this description concerning a country is comprised in its military geography, or what is perhaps a more correct term, its military “topography.”\*

### TOPOGRAPHY OF THE PENINSULA

Map I. (facing the Title-page) shows that the Peninsula is intersected by numerous mountain ranges, and many rivers. It is described by Lavallée, the great military geographer, as being “a chaos of mountains and deep defiles, where 300 men might stop an army—of bare plains—of

\* Geography means strictly speaking a description of the mere, natural earth; Topography, a description of places on it as well.

ravines, impenetrable in winter on account of their waters, and in summer on account of their steepness—of rivers, having dangerous fords and not many bridges—of isolated towns, surrounded by walls—and of few roads.”

The country rises up at all points from the coast towards the centre, and the central portion consists of a comparatively flat plateau, many feet above the level of the sea. It is often of importance to understand the relative elevations of a country's surface, and to be able to do this, one of the first things to notice is the course of the great rivers. Water must flow downwards; if, therefore, we trace these rivers and some of the streams flowing into them to their various sources, and join the highest sources with an imaginary line, it is evident that the ground over which this line would pass must be comparatively elevated. Such a line is called the “*line of water-parting*,” or “water-shed,” of a country. We can trace it in the Peninsula, from Cape Tarifa in the south, running eastwards along the Alpujarras to the Sierra Alcaraz, and then turning to the north, and following upwards the crest-line of the Iberian Mountains, which are composed of the Sierras Alcaraz, Cuença, Urbion, and Reynosa, until it meets in the extreme north the great chain of the Pyrenees. This latter chain completely traverses the Peninsula in its northern part from west to east—*i.e.* from Cape Finisterre to Cape Creux—and its slopes form a high wall from which the country descends abruptly towards the north, in the direction of the sea or of France. In the south of Spain the Alpujarras form a

## 30 TOPOGRAPHY OF PENINSULA

similar wall, elevated high above the Mediterranean, and from which the country slopes steeply towards the south—the sea-coast. The Iberian Mountains connecting the Pyrenees in the north with the Alpujarras in the south, descend with some steepness towards the east—*i.e.* towards the River Ebro and the Mediterranean; but on the west incline very gradually towards the Atlantic. It is because this western slope comprises the central portion of the Peninsula, and is at first so very gradual, that the middle of the country has the plateau-like character above alluded to.

The whole country may, in fact, be compared in shape to a gigantic pyramid, of which the top had been cut off, and of which the summit (or central table-land) rises on an average to from 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the sea. It has also been likened to an inverted soup-plate, the rim of which varies in width.

### *Climate, Resources, etc.*

It results from this peculiar formation that we find in the Peninsula great varieties of climate, and that an army operating in that country is exposed to extremes of heat and cold. There are also great differences in the products of the soil. The elevated central portion, especially around Madrid, consists of barren and wind-swept plains, without water, and crowned by jagged ridges or sierras.

The provinces between this portion and the surrounding coast have a more productive soil. In the Castiles, and the south of Leon, wheat and barley grow freely, and in Estremadura there are

extensive tracts of pasture-land, where large flocks of sheep are reared.

The southern and eastern provinces of Spain (such as Andalusia and Valencia), which border upon the sea, are the rich districts of the Peninsula. Here the soil, heated by an almost tropical sun and fanned by breezes from the ocean, produces in abundance almost every kind of fruit and of grain, and, where irrigated, forms excellent pasture-land.

In Portugal, corn is grown on the table-lands, especially in the Alemtejo and the northern provinces ; but though the soil of this kingdom is in parts fertile, there is comparatively but little cultivation.

In fact, the Peninsula was by nature a fairly fertile country, but its inhabitants were indolent and averse to labour, and many of its provinces were, at the time of which we write, but thinly populated. It was a country, therefore, in which the certainty of obtaining provisions readily at any point, could not be counted upon, and it has been said, with reference to this, and to the difficult nature of the ground, that "a small army must be defeated there, and a large one starve."

Regarding the description of carriage which could be procured in it, animals and waggons suitable for heavy transport were most difficult to obtain in any quarter. Mules and bullocks were used almost entirely for drawing the carts of the country, and horses were indifferent and scarce.

### *Mountains*

Traversing the slope which descends westward from the crest-line of the Iberian Mountains, and



includes the central plateau, are three great mountain chains. These are named differently at various points of their course, but it is sufficient to term them here (beginning from the most southern), the Sierra Morena, the Mountains of Toledo, and the Sierra Guadarama.

Together with the Pyrenees in the north, and the Alpujarras in the south, they divide this western slope into four distinct basins, down which four of the principal rivers of the Peninsula flow towards the sea; these basins are those of the Guadalquiver, the Guadiana, the Tagus, and the Douro.

The general course and nature of these mountain chains should be especially noticed, for they form great barriers, completely separating these river basins one from the other. The thumb and fingers of a hand spread out flat upon a table would represent the mountain chains, and the spaces between them the river basins.

*The Alpujarras.*—A short and very high chain. Its summits are covered with perpetual snow, and to the north it throws out many spurs, through which the Guadalquiver forces its way.

*The Sierra Morena*, springing directly from the Iberian Mountains, and terminating at the mouth of the Guadiana. Its northern slopes, at the commencement, mingle with the central plateau; but the southern are rugged and precipitous.

*The Mountains of Toledo.*—This chain blends at first almost imperceptibly with the central plateau, so that the basins of the Tagus and Guadiana, are

only separated at their heads by a few slight eminences ; and thus communication from one basin to the other, near the sources of these rivers, is easy. As the range approaches the Portuguese frontier it takes the name of the Sierra San Mahmed, and runs close to the River Guadiana. Thence it turns towards the south, under the names of the Sierra Estremoz and Sierra Monchique, throwing off branches to the east which impede the course of the Guadiana, and finally terminates at Cape St. Vincent.

*The Sierra Guadarama.*—This chain springs from the Iberian Mountains, under the name of the Somo Sierra, and extends in a sinuous line towards the west. Between Madrid and Ciudad-Rodrigo it throws off branches to the north, which form formidable barriers, only passable at certain points, and is remarkable at the Sierras of Gredos and Gata for the width and steepness of its slopes to the south. After crossing the Portuguese frontier it divides into three main branches. Of these, the principal is the Sierra Estrella, spurs from which interrupt and bar the River Tagus, jutting out also towards the Coa and Agueda, and which extends (under the name of the Sierra Cintra) to beyond Lisbon.

*The Pyrenees.*—This great mountain range (termed in the north-west corner of the Peninsula the “*Maritime*” Pyrenees) is in parts, and especially in the north-west, very wild and difficult in character. Notice should be taken of the series of mountain ridges enclosing the basins of the Minho and the Sil, and of the long spurs which

## 34 TOPOGRAPHY OF PENINSULA

cross the Portuguese frontier between the Rivers Sabor, Tua, and Tamega.

We have now considered the course and character of the mountain ranges and slopes which branch off to the *westward* of the crest-line of the Iberian Mountains. Let us now turn our attention to those on the *eastward* of this crest-line. The eastern slope of the Iberian Mountains themselves, together with that portion of the Pyrenees termed the Continental Pyrenees, separating Spain from France, enclose the basin of the Ebro, a large and important river which forms, as it were, a wet ditch in front of the Spanish defensive line of the Iberian chain. Many ridges and spurs intersect this basin, and impede the course of the river, rendering its navigation impossible. The principal mass of the chain of the Pyrenees is steep and rocky, and covered with snow and ice. That portion of it along the French frontier is highest about the centre of its length, and lowest towards the two extremities, south of Bayonne and Perpignan.

*The frontier line* between France and Spain, commencing at the mouth of the Bidassoa (near Bayonne), runs in its general direction along this great mountain barrier, until it strikes the Mediterranean at Cape Creux.

### *Roads*

Roads in mountain districts are, as a rule, conducted for convenience over the lowest depressions of the chains, the spots where they cross being denominated "passes." These passes were comparatively few in number, and many of them

though good in fine weather, became impracticable during the rainy season.

*From France into Spain*, across the Pyrenees, there were but two high roads ; one from Bayonne, through Irun and Vittoria, to Burgos, and from thence to Madrid by Aranda and the *Somo Sierra Pass*, or by Valladolid and the *Escorial Pass*.

One from Perpignan, by Belgarde, to Barcelona ; here the road divided into two branches—one leading to the south of Spain through Valencia, the other to Madrid by Lerida and Saragossa.

There were other roads and paths traversing the Continental Pyrenees, such as that from Bayonne, by Maya and Roncesvalles to Pampeluna, but many were impracticable for wheeled transport, and some were mere footpaths.

*From Portugal into Spain* there were but few roads, and Lisbon and Madrid were connected by but two good lines of communication :

(1) The road south of the Tagus, by Elyas, Badajoz, and Almaraz, crossing the river at this point.

(2) The road north of the Tagus, by Coimbra, Viseu, Almeida, and Ciudad-Rodrigo.

It can be seen that the ridge of the Sierra Estrella interposed between these two highways. Across it there existed only indifferent roads, one being from Abrantes, by Thomar and Espinhal, to Almeida.

A tolerably good one led from Abrantes, close to the course of the Tagus, through Alcantara and Coria, and thence over the Sierra Gata to Ciudad-Rodrigo.

*Rivers*

The great rivers of the Peninsula, winding between mountain spurs, were only navigable for a comparatively short distance from their mouths ; so that the transport of stores by them for many miles into the interior was impossible. Speaking generally, they were obstacles to, more often than a means of, communication, and it should be remarked that the navigable portions of the two most important ones—viz. the Tagus and the Douro—lie in Portugal.

Good roads traverse them at comparatively few points ; rocky ledges occur often throughout their course, and they are, as a rule, dry in summer and rapid and swollen in winter.

Bridges and fords are found at intervals, but the former, with some exceptions, are of a nature easily destroyed, and the latter are frequently available only at certain seasons.

Some of these rivers require special notice.

1. *The Guadalquivir*.—Flowing past Seville, an important city, where there was a cannon foundry ; navigable as far as that point.

2. *The Guadiana*.—This river rises among the marshes of the central plateau, and passing by Merida and Badajoz, flows through Portugal, forming its boundary along portions of its course. In Portugal *no bridge existed across it*.

3. *The Tagus*.—This river, in its upper portion, has a rocky bed and high banks, and at any other time but during the extreme droughts of summer is very difficult of passage. At Almaraz and

Alcantara there were good bridges. As it enters the frontier of Portugal it is tortuous and full of rapids, forming a serious obstacle. This is its character as far as Abrantes, where it widens out and becomes navigable. From this point to Lisbon it varies from 300 yards to five miles in breadth, narrowing before it enters the sea.

4. *The Mondego* flows at first among almost inaccessible mountains; and, emerging into the plains at Coimbra, enters the sea at Figueras.

5. *The Douro* takes its rise in the Iberian Mountains, and passes Aranda and Valladolid. As it nears the frontier of Portugal it encounters a ridge springing from the Maritime Pyrenees and turns southwards, forming for some distance the boundary between Spain and Portugal. It then crosses the latter country and enters the sea near Oporto. Above this place it is more than 300 yards wide, and in winter is difficult of passage. It is navigable from the Portuguese frontier to the sea.

6. *The Minho*.—This river traverses a very mountainous and broken country, and is joined near Orense by the Sil, which also forces its way through many mountain spurs. After this junction it issues from the mountains, and from this point to the sea forms the boundary between Spain and Portugal.

7. *The Ebro*—an important river—rises near the junction of the Iberian Mountains with the Pyrenees, and flows south-eastward through a confined and mountainous country. It passes by Tudela and Saragossa. Below the latter place

obstacles impede its course at every moment, until it empties itself into the sea near Tortosa.

We have given above only the principal rivers of the Peninsula, but as each courses to the ocean many minor streams flow into it. Descending from the enclosing mountains on the right hand and on the left, they mingle with the main rivers and are called their "affluents." To enumerate these is unnecessary, but many shown on the map will become familiar in connection with the operations we are about to describe.

### *Harbours*

These are numerous, and are many of them good. Beginning at the northern coast, near the French frontier, and going round by the western and southern coasts, we may draw attention to the following.

St. Sebastian, Ferrol, Corunna—good ports and fortified.

Vigo, a small but safe harbour.

Oporto, at the mouth of the Douro, rather a dangerous port, by reason of its sandbanks and islands.

Figueras, at the mouth of the Mondego, a small harbour.

Lisbon, on the Tagus, a very fine port; it was strongly fortified. The city of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, contained an arsenal and the chief military and naval establishments of the kingdom.

Cadiz, near the mouth of the Guadalquiver, a large port with fortified roadstead, situated upon

the island of Leon, and separated from the main land by a channel.

Gibraltar, a large port with an almost impregnable fortress, belonging to England. The harbour is not a specially good one.

Carthagena	}	All good ports and more or less fortified.
Alicante		
Tarragona		
Barcelona		

### *Fortresses*

Fortresses are usually erected by a nation to defend what are considered particularly important points of its territory. We have seen that there were only two great roads leading from France into Spain—viz. those through Bayonne and Perpignan. We therefore find Spanish fortresses placed to guard these roads, or the passes and country near them, — such as, near the western road, St. Sebastian and Pampeluna; on the eastern, Figueras, Gerona, and Barcelona.

Burgos, on the Bayonne-Madrid road, at the junction of two roads leading towards Madrid, was defended by a strong castle.

Upon the frontier dividing Spain from Portugal, the two good roads—viz. those through Ciudad-Rodrigo and Badajoz—were guarded by important fortresses. The Portuguese fortress of Almeida was faced by the Spanish one of Ciudad-Rodrigo, and the Portuguese fortress of Elvas by the Spanish one of Badajoz.

Gibraltar guards for England the passage between the Atlantic and Mediterranean Seas.



## COMMENTS

From what has been said regarding the strength and position of the armies, and the military topography of the Peninsula, we can understand the motives for certain measures which would not otherwise be clear to us.

1. The reason for the selection of Lisbon and Cadiz as the starting points for the British army is apparent.

It might seem, at first sight, that it would have been more advantageous to have directed the army towards the western or eastern extremity of the Pyrenees, in order that, by at once operating against the roads through Bayonne or Perpignan, it might intercept the French line of supplies, and interpose between the enemy and France; but the superior *numbers* of the French would alone have rendered this course impracticable. Great Britain could most efficiently aid her allies by attacking the French at their greatest distance from France, and therefore from succour and support.

On this ground alone an advance against Junot in Portugal, and against those French corps the furthest detached from their own country, was judicious.

Lisbon, therefore, and Cadiz were clearly suitable points. Moreover, they were both *good harbours*, and also, in themselves *places of importance*. It was of the first moment to wrest Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, and containing large military and naval establishments, from the French hands. It was also of consequence that the French should

not be permitted to seize Cadiz, and so gain a hold over one of the richest provinces of Spain—viz. Andalusia.

There was another military reason of the greatest weight which made the seizure of Lisbon and occupation of Portugal desirable, and that was the natural *strength of the frontier of that kingdom towards Spain*. Although it involves some repetition of what we have already said, we again draw attention to this.

Beginning at the south, and following the frontier line, we have first the River Guadiana, without any bridges over it, backed by the Sierras of Monchique and Estremoz, and covered by the fortress of Elvas. North of this the spurs of the Sierra San Mahmed and Sierra Estrella, meeting on the banks of the Tagus, scarcely allow a passage for that river, and make of it a tortuous and broken stream, in itself an additional obstacle. Then the chain of the Sierra Estrella, and the spurs it throws out between the Rivers Coa and Agueda, covered by the fortress of Almeida; then the Douro; then the mountain range to the north, with the spurs between the Sabor, the Tua, and the Tamega; and, last of all, the River Minho.

Portugal, therefore, presented towards Spain a great natural barrier, the two main roads across which were defended by fortresses. This kingdom once gained, the British and Portuguese would have a strong position from which to attack the enemy in Spain, and one from which it would be most difficult to dislodge them. Though the resources of the country were small, England had

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that inestimable advantage which dominant sea-power confers. She held the command of the sea, from which she could obtain supplies, and she could secure the navigable portions both of the Tagus and the Douro, two of the most important of the Peninsular rivers.

Again, an advance into Spain from a *westerly direction*—*i.e.* from the direction of Portugal—up one of the great river basins, would be easier than an advance from any other direction, such as the north or south, over the mountain barriers which run east and west.

2. We see also certain advantages possessed by Napoleon.

He had established himself in the centre of Spain, and could move at pleasure from the elevated central plateau surrounding Madrid down the basins of the Douro, the Tagus, or the Guadiana, in support of the army under Junot, which had been already *pushed past* the strong fortress-guarded frontier of Portugal. His numbers also gave him the power of operating along two or three of the river basins at once, thus threatening many points, as well as holding under subjection different portions of the Peninsula.

3. Some disadvantages of his position are also made clear.

The French armies, though they could enter these river basins easily from the central plateau, would, as they descended them, become separated by difficult mountain chains, with few passes over them, so that they could not move rapidly to the assistance of each other, nor keep up a good com-

munication. It is easy to see that the existence of these parallel ribs of mountains—which have been compared to the jagged-shaped waves of a great petri-fied sea—influenced materially the position of the French. Napoleon, having secured the possession of them, could, it is true, use them as barriers against an enemy coming from the south ; but if it became necessary for him to face an enemy that could break out at pleasure from any point in the *west*, (for instance, against one holding Portugal), they would act as serious obstacles to his own army, dividing his front, which must be extended in these different basins to watch that enemy.

The French line of communication by Bayonne was a long one, and passed over ranges of mountains. *It required many men to guard it against the hostile Spanish population.* Strong detachments had to be employed in watching it and in escorting supplies, and this weakened the French army. Napoleon—partly for this reason, no doubt—made use chiefly of the one high road through Bayonne for the transport of his troops and *matériel* throughout the war. It led more directly than that by Perpignan to the centre of Spain, and to have protected two long lines of communication would have been very difficult under the circumstances in which he was placed.

In short, the French generals, in spite of the number of their soldiery, were about to contend against many disadvantages, not the least among these being the rugged nature of the country, adapted to defence by a hostile population, and the readiness with which the bulk of

## 44 PROSPECTS OF THE BRITISH

the peasantry would naturally give information to their enemies.

With regard to the prospects under which the British were entering upon the war, England had, upon her side, as relative advantages, all the points which have been above alluded to as bearing disadvantageously upon the French. Her army was going to fight in a friendly country, whose government and inhabitants would, it was expected (an expectation, however, scarcely realised), aid it with ability as well as zeal. She had money—the sinews of war—and she had also the command of the sea; a point, as we have already said, of a very special value. This afforded her a facility in forwarding supplies, and gave her power to distract the attention of the French by threatening descents upon various parts of the coast.

The principal disadvantage which she laboured under was the numerical weakness of her army compared with that of the French.

## CHAPTER III

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### CAMPAIGN IN PORTUGAL, 1808 ROLEIA ; VIMIERA ; CONVENTION OF CINTRA

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THE troops composing the British army were collected from various quarters. One portion, under Sir Arthur Wellesley (about 9,000), sailed from Cork ; another, under Sir John Moore (about 10,000), from Sweden, where it had been previously sent upon an expedition to aid the Swedes against Russia, which had terminated ; and a third, under General Spencer (about 5,000), from Gibraltar.

Sir Arthur Wellesley had the chief command at the outset, but two senior officers to him (Sir Harry Burrard and Sir Hew Dalrymple) were ordered at the same time to join the army. The troops under Wellesley and Moore were directed towards the coast of Portugal, and those under Spencer towards Cadiz. It happened, however, that the destination of Spencer's force was almost immediately changed, for a Spanish victory—one of the few of the war—was at this time gained

Aug. 1,  
1808.

over the French corps which, as we have mentioned on page 27, was moving upon Cadiz. Cadiz and Andalusia were, in consequence of the French defeat, saved from immediate danger; and Wellesley therefore ordered Spencer to join him in Portugal.

The selection of a spot for disembarkation had next to be considered.

The coast of Portugal is a difficult one upon which to effect a landing. Lisbon was the point which it was the main *object* of the expedition to seize, *i.e.* (in technical language) it was "*the objective point*" of the campaign; but to attempt to attack this city by a descent at the mouth of the Tagus would have been hazardous. The heavy surf, the forts, and the strength of the French, all rendered it inadvisable. Peniché, a little harbour north of it upon the coast, was also commanded by French guns; so Figueras, at the mouth of the Mondego river, where a landing, it was discovered, could be effected without opposition, was chosen.

On August 1st, 1808, Sir Arthur Wellesley began to land his troops; Spencer arrived a few days subsequently; and without waiting for Sir John Moore, the British, joined by a small force of Portuguese, and numbering under 15,000 in all, with 18 guns, advanced towards Lisbon, and entered upon the series of campaigns which lasted for nearly six years in the Peninsula and south of France.

## OBIDOS—BATTLE OF ROLEIA 47

### COMBAT OF OBIDOS

Aug. 16-  
17, 1808.

*August 16th, 1808*

The army came into collision for the first time with the enemy at Obidos, where, on the evening of August 16th, some men fell in a skirmish with Laborde's French division. Obidos is thus noteworthy as the place where British blood was first shed in the Peninsula.

Laborde, falling back, made a stand at Roleia (see Map II., facing page 58), where a range of heights offered a good position, his object being to check the Allied advance towards Lisbon, and give the French forces behind him time to concentrate.

### BATTLE OF ROLEIA \*

*August 17th, 1808*

(See plan facing page 48)

On the 17th Sir Arthur Wellesley moved forward to drive the French from this position. The Allied strength was about 14,000, with 18 guns; that of the French about 5,000, with 5 guns. Being thus greatly superior in numbers, he advanced in three columns, directing one against the centre, and, with the two others, turning the French flanks—the Portuguese their left.

After a cannonade and slight resistance, Laborde, seeing himself outflanked, fell back to a yet stronger position not far behind, on heights overlooking the village of Columbiera.

\* The Spanish towns and villages from which the Peninsular battles take their names are variously spelt in various histories. The spelling followed in these pages is that of the official Army List.



Aug. 17,  
1808.

Sir Arthur's attack against this position was made on the same principle as that against the first; but, owing either to an incomplete understanding of what was intended, or possibly from being too eager to close with the French, the Allied centre and left did not give the turning troops on the extreme left sufficient time to get well round the French right flank before committing themselves to a direct and difficult attack against that flank and against the centre, thus throwing away to a great extent the benefit of their superiority of force, while the advantage of the ground was entirely with their enemy.

As a consequence of this divergence from instructions, the Allied loss was heavier than it need have been; but their advance was so determined and steady, that in the end it carried all before it; and finally Laborde—wounded himself, and in danger of being cut off—was forced to retire towards Torres Vedras. The French had not succeeded in checking the Allied advance on Lisbon to any serious extent.

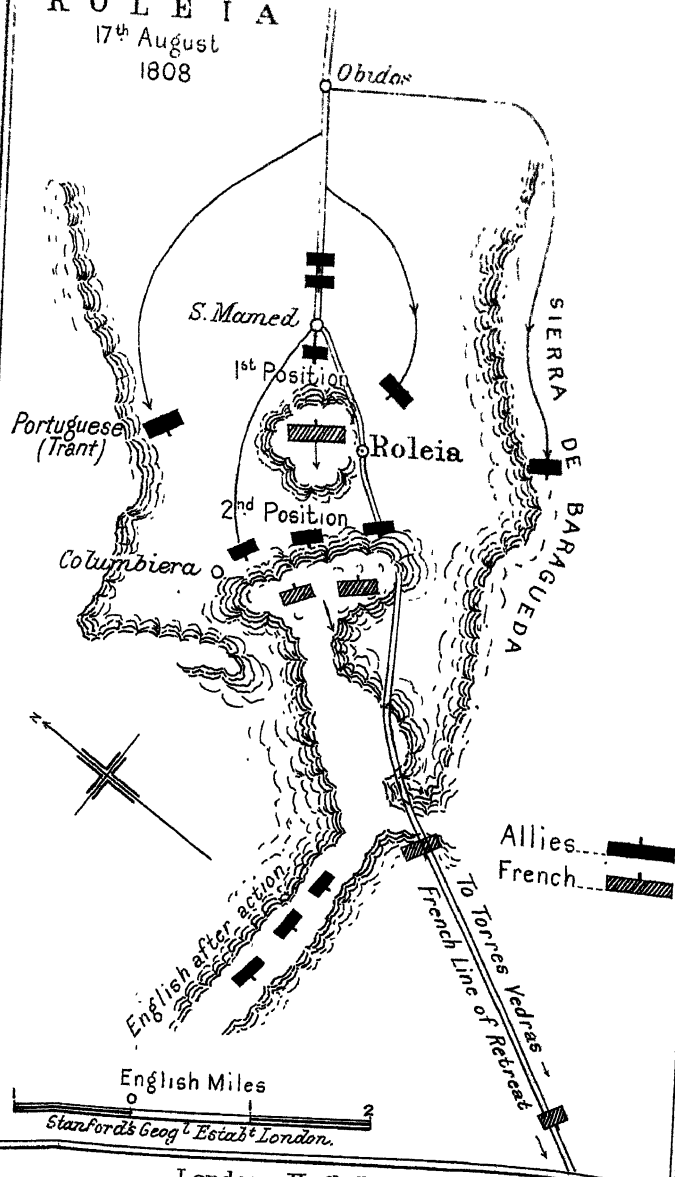
This battle has the interest of being the first serious one in the Peninsula in which the French soldier, accustomed to constant victory under Napoleon, met the British, and in it failed to drive back the determined advance of the British infantry. The loss\* of the Allies was about 500; that of the French 600 and 3 guns.

“Roleia,” as a bar to the Peninsular medal, and

\* When not otherwise stated this always means throughout these pages the loss in killed, wounded, and missing, given in round numbers merely. Different accounts vary materially at times in these details.



# BATTLE OF ROLEIA 17<sup>th</sup> August 1808



London : Hugh Rees, Ltd.

battle-honour on the colours and appointments of <sup>Aug. 17-</sup>regiments entitled to it, commemorates this battle. <sup>20, 1808</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the Duke of Wellington (Sir Arthur Wellesley at this period) has been sometimes held to have been too exacting as a leader in insisting upon a most literal and rigid obedience to his orders. Possibly this first serious encounter with the enemy in Portugal impressed the necessity of this upon him, in the interests of the army. Napier, though stating that, in war, mistakes are the rule, not the exception, speaks of there having been a "fierce neglect of orders" in certain instances on this occasion.

The lesson is, that subordinates must add to daring the quality of self-restraint, and conform to the general plan and instructions of their superiors. This, and the combination by Sir Arthur Wellesley of flank with direct attacks, are points to be specially noted. Had his design been literally carried out, the French would have been manœuvred out of their position with comparatively little loss to the British forces.

Laborde was joined at Torres Vedras by Junot with all his available troops from Lisbon, and Sir Arthur Wellesley advanced to Vimiera, keeping towards the sea-coast in order to open communication with the fleet and protect the landing of reinforcements. On the 20th a brigade under General Anstruther (about 4,000) appeared off the coast; it was safely disembarked, and twelve days' provisions having been collected, orders were given for an immediate movement towards Torres Vedras.

Aug. 21,  
1808

Sir John Moore was at this time close to the mouth of the Mondego, and it was Sir Arthur Wellesley's plan that he should land there, move down upon Santarem, cross the Tagus in that neighbourhood, and threaten to cut off the French communication with Elvas, while he (Sir Arthur) endeavoured to reach Lisbon.

The country intervening between Vimiera and Lisbon was most difficult, the only good road between these points leading through the pass or defile of Torres Vedras. There was, however, a very indifferent road which turned this pass nearer the sea-coast; and Sir Arthur hoped, by attempting a daring march along it (it was not apparently watched), to reach Mafra, and interpose his army by a surprise between Junot and Lisbon.

This plan of Sir Arthur Wellesley was never carried out. Sir Harry Burrard arrived off Vimiera in a man-of-war on the night of the 20th, and, without landing, counter-ordered the movement, directing the army to stand fast until joined by Sir John Moore.

The French, in the meantime, had determined to assume the offensive, and, on the morning of the 21st, appeared opposite to the English position, and rashly attacked it without reconnoitring. This brought on the

#### BATTLE OF VIMIERA

*August 21st, 1808*

(See plan facing page 56)

In this battle the Allies numbered about 18,000, of whom some 16,000 were British, with 18 guns;

but they were very deficient in cavalry, the strength of which was only one squadron. Aug. 21  
1808

The French numbered about 14,000, but were stronger in both cavalry and artillery, having over 20 guns of light calibre.

The Allies held a good position on broken and partly wooded ground. The right (Hill's brigade) occupied a height trending from the sea inland; the left also was on high ground, having in front an almost impassable ravine; while in the centre lay the village of Vimiera, masked from the French view by an isolated hill in front, on which some infantry and guns were posted (under Anstruther and Fane). In front of the position the little stream of the Maceira flowed towards the sea.

We have said that Junot attacked this position without reconnoitring it, for which he has been blamed. Nothing but a very strong necessity can justify a leader of troops from not making every effort to ascertain the nature of a position, and how it is occupied and can be best approached, before he attacks it.

Junot, being superior to the Allies in cavalry, could certainly have found out more than he did as to their strength and position; but the reason he did not reconnoitre was no doubt this. His attack was meant to be a surprise, the success of which the appearance of any reconnoitring troops would have endangered. He also greatly underestimated the character of the British troops and the skill of their leader, whom he had never met in battle.

As a fact, the attack was a surprise, for on the

Aug. 21, 1808, evening before it had been entirely unexpected, and the Allied troops had to form rather hastily to meet it. It would have been a still greater one had it been possible to carry it out exactly as it had been planned.

Junot had marched all night, designing to attack at dawn, but the difficult ground and other accidents delayed him very greatly, and it was 8 o'clock (*i.e.* hours after daybreak at this time of the year—August) when he came face to face with the Allied position, the dust of his march having been perceptible to the Allies for a little time before.

The high ground, behind which the Allied left lay, appeared to him to be denuded of troops, and imagining that the main body of his enemy rested behind the isolated central hill, his efforts in the battle which ensued were directed to force the Allied centre and left, or turn the latter, so as to drive the Allies westward off the road to Mafra and Lisbon, and towards the sea.

But, Napier writes, "To act on conjectures is dangerous in war ; Junot's were all false. . . . Soon that general discovered the mischief of over-haste." The rocky and broken ground which his troops had to cross involved him in immediate difficulties, and he had to attack under every disadvantage.

Did the fame of Sir Arthur Wellesley (Wellington) as a leader, instead of being based, as it is, upon many other great qualifications, rest solely on the following two facts—that he realized, when few others did so, the great importance of concealing his troops behind the reverse slopes of

hills, in woods, and in the folds of the ground up to the very last moment; and also of meeting dense "columns" with the musketry fire of the "line,"—he would still stand prominently out as one of the greatest generals of any nation on the battle-field.

Aug. 21,  
1808

These two principles, now accepted as axioms, he early laid stress on, and put in practice from Vimiera to Waterloo, and it is perhaps not too much to say that, as the result, the fate of Europe was changed. On account of this, and because Vimiera illustrates them both, we allude to them here more particularly.

Behind those heights on the left, which to Junot appeared unoccupied, lay British troops, ready to advance to the sky-line and pour in their fire. Sir Arthur, whose grasp of a battle-field and handling of troops upon it were very quick, reinforced his left with four brigades also from behind the central hill unobserved by the French; and the pluck and tenacity of the British officer and soldier did the rest. In this battle the fire of Robe's artillery was very effective, and contributed greatly to the victory. All the attacks of Junot's heavy columns were repulsed, and in the end he was himself driven off the most direct road to Lisbon (through Torres Vedras) with serious loss.

To make clear the principle upon which meeting the column with the line rested, it is necessary to explain that the French, and other Continental nations, attacked in close columns, the mass and weight of which must, it was considered, by their impact, carry them through any thin line with



Aug. 21,  
1808

which they could close. This view was no unsound one, but it was based upon the supposition that the column could close; while Wellington's conviction was, that when a line opposed to the column would stand firm, and, without being unnerved by its menacing and near approach, receive it with a concentrated fire, the column in reality could not close; for the column had this weak point, that its front ranks alone could use their muskets.

In the British "line" every man could use his musket freely, and while that portion opposite the head of the column, disregarding the threatening advance of such a dense mass of men, received them coolly with its fire, another part of the line, wheeling up and overlapping the column as it drew near, poured volleys into its flank or flanks.

The firmness of the British infantry justified Wellington's confidence in it; and the result was, that throughout the battles of the Peninsular War and at Waterloo, the effect of the British musketry fire poured in from more than one direction by the line upon the French attacking columns, was such that consternation and confusion soon ensued in the latter, in which all order was rapidly lost.

The men, hampered by the dead and dying, were unable to act or advance; and then, with bayonets fixed, the line poured in a final volley and prepared to charge. The column seldom awaited that charge, though occasionally, as in this battle, it may have done so; but it usually became panic-stricken and fled before it.

Vimiera is one of the battles in which the execution done with the actual bayonet itself is said to have been great, probably because the attacking “column” there met the “line” for the first time; but the chief lesson taught by Vimiera, as well as by several other battles, is the great importance of securing a superiority of musketry (or what is in the present day “rifle”) fire. When to that is added the power to resort also to the bayonet if necessary, the value of which weapon has been illustrated in even our most recent wars—such as during the South African campaign, and the sorties around Ladysmith—steady, disciplined infantry becomes truly formidable, and can generally decide the day.

The unexpected misfortunes which attended Junot’s contemplated surprise of a position he had not reconnoitred have also marred some enterprises similar to his in our latest wars; but the lesson to be drawn from this is not that all risk should be nervously avoided. War is a game of risks. Risks must for great objects be accepted; and such surprises, successfully carried out, have won campaigns.

The true lessons are rather that the dangers attendant on “acting on conjecture,” and the mishaps that have often and unexpectedly marred success, and may do so again, should be borne in mind; that no money or exertion should be spared to procure what information is possible; and that arrangements should be made, in the event of bad fortune, to withdraw in time before being irretrievably committed to a disastrous position.

Aug. 21-  
23, 1808

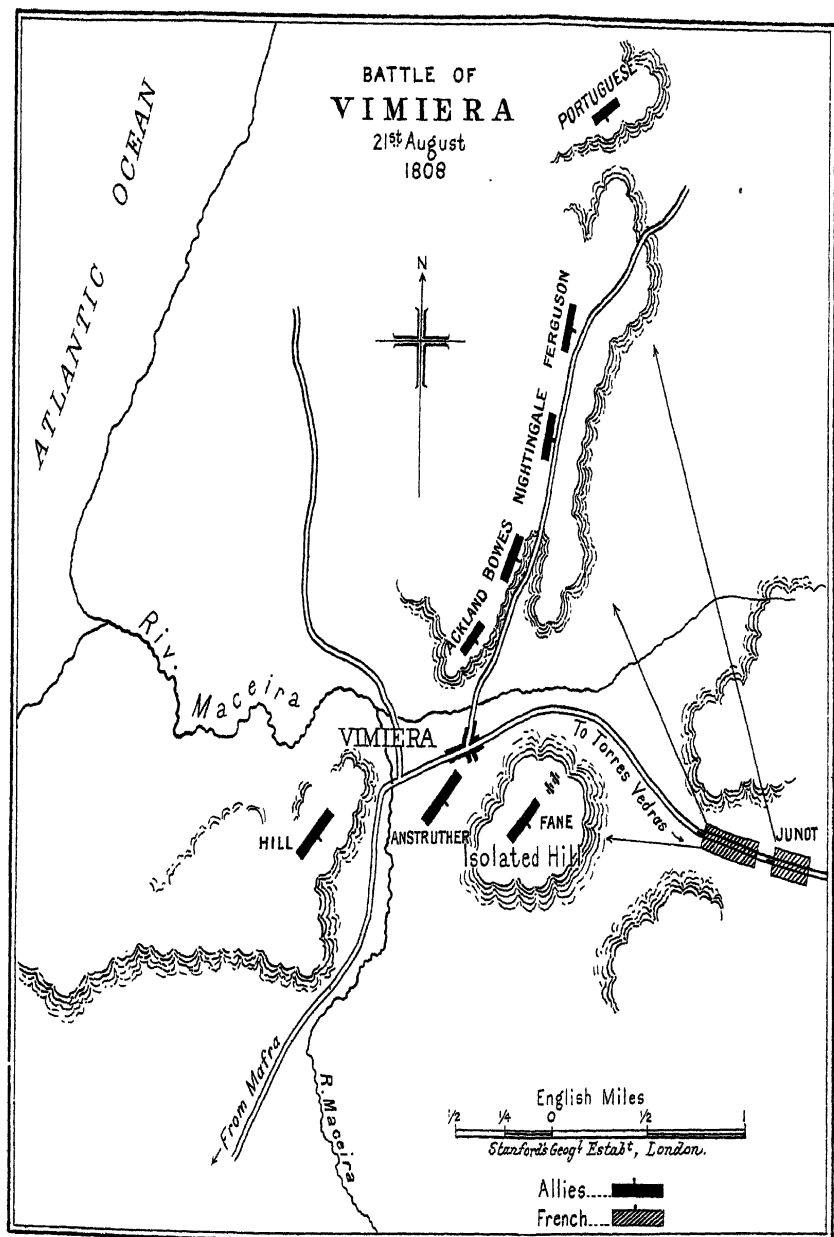
The loss of the French in the battle of Vimiera was about 2,000 and 13 guns; that of the Allies about 800.

“Vimiera,” as a bar to the Peninsular medal and a battle-honour, commemorates this victory.

At the close of the day the British, having defeated the enemy's attack, held the Torres Vedras road, while the bulk of the French had been driven off some distance to the east of it. Sir Arthur now strongly urged Sir Harry Burrard to follow up the victory by making a rapid march upon Torres Vedras with a portion of his force, in order to gain that pass, while the remainder pursued the enemy, driving him over the mountains to the east. Sir Harry, however, considered that a small portion only of the French army had been engaged, and was against further pursuit, judging that it would be more judicious to wait for Sir John Moore. The following morning Sir Hew Dalrymple joined, and took the command out of the hands of Sir Harry Burrard. Thus the command of the army was changed three times in as many days, and in the immediate presence of the enemy, which was greatly against the adoption of any bold or decided course of action. On the 23rd, Junot, who had been allowed to make good his retreat by Torres Vedras upon Lisbon, sent an emissary to the British camp to negotiate for terms. This step was taken by him in consequence of the difficulty he experienced in keeping down the population of Lisbon, the fear he stood in of a forced retreat through the hostile country of Spain, and the







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probability of such a retreat being rendered inevitable by the arrival of Sir John Moore.

After a short negotiation a convention was agreed to, by which the French army *consented to evacuate Portugal (giving up Lisbon, Elvas, Almeida, and all the fortresses), provided they were sent back with their artillery and arms to France.*

#### COMMENTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

The great importance of the defile of Torres Vedras in this campaign is strikingly prominent.

We may mention that the term "*strategy*" means the art of moving troops to the best purpose when not actually fighting with an enemy; and "*tactics*," the art of moving them when in battle.\* Any point, therefore, not actually on a field of battle, the occupation of which would confer some special advantage upon its possessor, is called a "*strategical point*," an "*important strategical point*," or a "*decisive strategical point*," according to its character and value.

The defile of Torres Vedras may be justly termed an important strategical point in this campaign. To get through or past that defile was the great difficulty. The facts subsequently made known prove that, had Sir Arthur's advice to Sir Harry Burrard for an immediate advance after Vimiera to Torres Vedras been followed, the defile might have been seized and Junot cut off from Lisbon.

\* The two words are derived from the Greek: strategy from "*strategos*," a general; tactics from "*taxis*," an order of battle.



The unwillingness, though, of Sir Harry Burrard to risk an advance, arriving as he had done but recently on the scene, believing as he did that the French were stronger than they were, and knowing that after a few days Sir John Moore would arrive to strengthen him, can be readily understood. He had at the time (being Commander-in-Chief) greater responsibility than Sir Arthur, and few men have possessed the latter's talent for war.

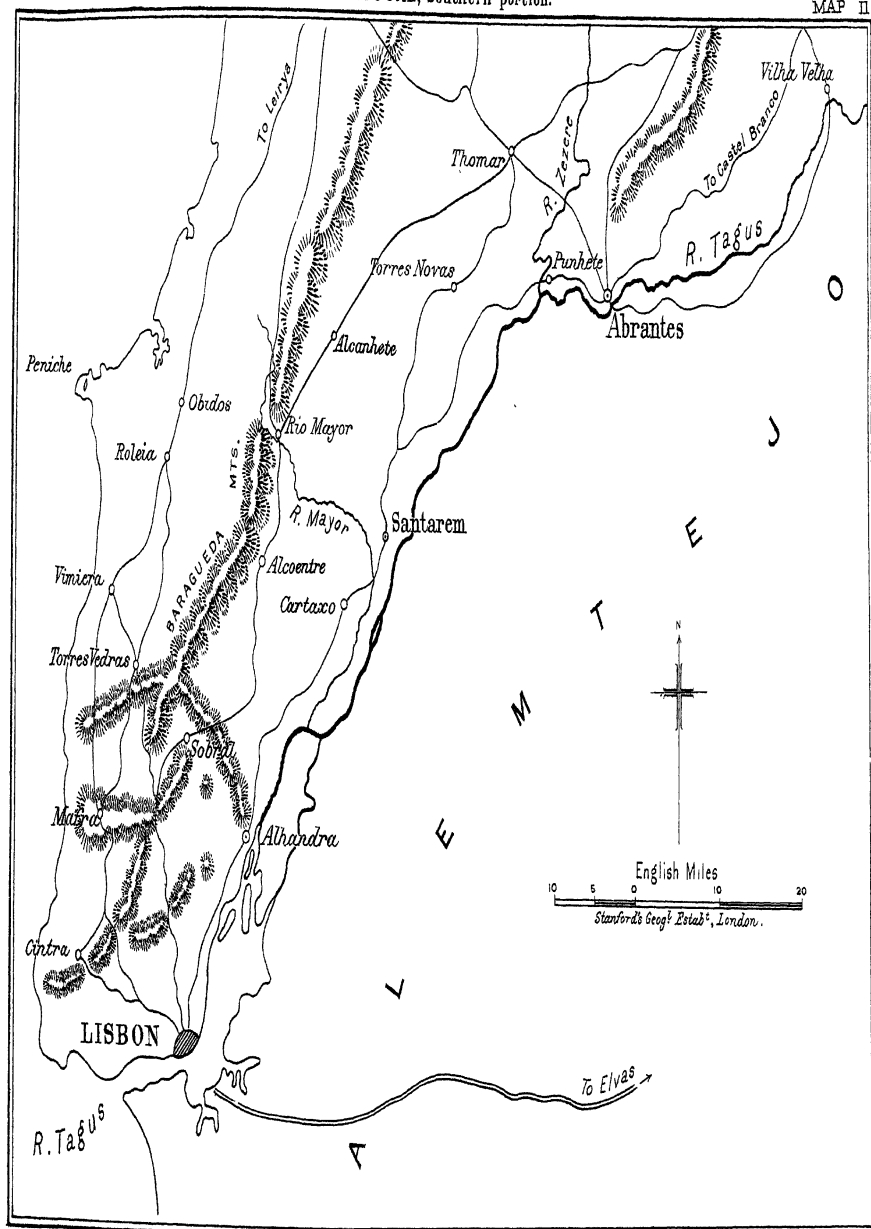
The frequent change of commanders was very detrimental. In war there should be but one supreme head, changed as seldom as possible. "Nothing is more important in war," writes Napoleon, "than unity of command."

The Convention of Cintra, so called from the little town near which it was drawn up, handed over Portugal to the British; and, though not negotiated by, it was signed by, Sir Arthur Wellesley, who, though differing as to the wisdom of some of its conditions, agreed with most.

The convention excited a storm of indignation at the time in England, because Junot was not forced into an *unconditional* surrender, but was permitted to withdraw his army. But though some of the details of the convention were apparently unwise, it was as a whole a most advantageous one for the British cause. Junot's retreat through Elvas still lay open. The army depended mainly for provisions on the fleet, which a gale would have driven from the coast, and it was therefore everything to secure the safety of the ships at once, by entering the mouth of the Tagus. If the convention had been refused and









Junot driven to resistance, it would have been necessary to subdue the forts near Lisbon; after this, perhaps, to transport artillery up the Tagus to Abrantes, and thence 70 miles by land, to besiege and take Elvas; and after that to take Almeida: and all this under the difficulties of bad roads and a great scarcity of every description of carriage. By the convention Portugal was set free, and its harbours, as well as the strong and fortified position which its frontier gave as a base for future operations against Spain, secured. Weighed against this, it was of little consequence that Junot's small force had escaped to swell the already enormous armies of Napoleon. However, on account of the outcry raised in England, Sir Hew Dalrymple, Sir Harry Burrard, and Sir Arthur Wellesley were all ordered home to appear before a court of inquiry. They were acquitted of blame, and we have the recorded opinion of Napoleon himself, that the convention which concluded this campaign was, on the whole, a clear *advantage* to the English and a mistake on the part of Junot. "I was about," he says, "to send Junot to a council of war, when fortunately the English tried *their generals*, and so saved me the pain of punishing an old friend."

The strategical advantage gained in this first campaign—and it was a great one—was the possession of Portugal, with its harbours open to the sea, and its frontier, both naturally and artificially strong towards Spain. It formed altogether a most excellent base from which to carry out operations against the French.

## CHAPTER IV

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CAMPAIGN IN SPAIN, 1808-9

MOORE ENTERS SPAIN—NAPOLEON ADVANCES AGAINST  
HIM—RETREAT TO CORUNNA

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DURING the arrangement of the convention of Cintra, Sir John Moore landed at Lisbon. His troops increased the British army to about 32,000 men ; and as Sir Hew Dalrymple, Sir H. Burrard, and Sir Arthur Wellesley had been ordered to England, the command of the forces devolved upon him.

A delay of some weeks occurred before active operations were resumed, mainly owing to the indecision of the British Government with regard to their future plans. Early in October despatches reached Moore, informing him that 10,000 men were to be sent from England under Sir David Baird, to be disembarked at Corunna ; and instructing him to take the field himself with 20,000, form a junction with Baird, and advance to the assistance of the Spanish armies.

Moore had no definite plan of campaign given to him. He was merely instructed to aid the Spaniards (after his junction with Baird), as circumstances might suggest ; and, considering that it would involve an unnecessary delay and a pre-

carious voyage if he joined Baird by sea, and also that to procure transport in Galicia would be difficult, he directed the latter general to march from Corunna through Galicia, his intention at first being to concentrate all his forces at Valladolid, Burgos, or whatever point might, later on, seem best. Oct. 26,  
1808

Moore's troops had, as may be seen from the map, a very long march before them; the roads were bad; he had to procure transport and arrange for supplies; Government had sent him little money, and the Portuguese distrusted all foreigners who could not pay in cash. All these difficulties weighed equally upon Sir David Baird. To use the words of Napier, "the local rulers were unfriendly, crafty, fraudulent; the peasantry suspicious, rude, disinclined towards strangers, and indifferent to public affairs; a few shots only were required to render theirs a hostile instead of a friendly greeting." It resulted from these harassing obstructions that Moore, with his troops, was not fairly off from Lisbon to join Baird until October 26th, 1808, he being in command of that army which was destined "to cover itself with glory, disgrace,\* victory, and misfortune" (*Autobiography of Sir Harry Smith*, edited by G. C. Moore Smith, 1902).

#### CHANGES WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE IN THE MEANTIME IN SPAIN

Bearing this date in mind, we now revert to the affairs of Spain, as a knowledge of the

\* Referring no doubt by this expression to the insubordination of some of the soldiery on the retreat to Corunna (see pages 70, 71).



Aug. to situation there at this period is necessary to render  
Oct. 1808 the events of the campaign clearly intelligible.

The defeat of the French corps moving upon Cadiz—see pages 27 and 46—which took place shortly before the landing of the British force, was one of a series of temporary checks which now began to fall upon the French armies, under the command of Joseph the Emperor's brother, Napoleon having left for Paris. The whole of the inhabitants of Spain rose in arms; and large bodies, composed partly of regular troops and partly of peasantry, more or less drilled and organized, advancing towards the capital, assumed a threatening attitude.

Joseph became alarmed, and, retiring from Madrid towards Vittoria, collected the whole French army behind the Ebro.

The Spaniards now considered victory as already obtained, and with extravagant ideas of their own power, the troops of Spain, hastily raised, indifferently disciplined, and ignorantly despising the French, advanced against Joseph, and even spoke of a subsequent invasion of France.

One body on the extreme left took up a position in front of Bilbao, in Biscay, endeavouring to encircle and get round the French forces; another, crossing the Ebro, collected beyond Tudela; and a third, massing lower down the river in the province of Aragon, formed the right. Behind these troops other forces, in support, protected Madrid, which city was re-occupied by the Spanish. Everything at this time looked promising for Spain, but her troops were in reality perfectly unequal to contend with the armies of France. Napoleon had

begun, early in October, 1808 (*i.e.* about the same time that Sir J. Moore had received his instructions to advance from Lisbon and join Baird), to put his columns in movement towards the Pyrenees, and on October 30th quitted Paris to place himself at their head. As soon as his reinforcements, which were to raise the French army in the Peninsula to 250,000 men, arrived, in the month of November, 1808, in front of the Spaniards, the latter were routed and dispersed in every direction. Napoleon rapidly advanced to Burgos, and having detached a corps towards the Carrion river to watch for the British and protect his own right flank, moved towards Madrid.

Oct. and  
Nov. 1808

To revert to Moore's operations :—

Before marching from Lisbon on October 26th, he had been assured upon all sides that the roads north of the Tagus were impassable for artillery and heavy carriages, and though he found out afterwards, while on the march, that this was not entirely the case, they were unquestionably very bad. He therefore felt obliged to divide his army, and arranged his march as follows.

The main body to move—part by Coimbra, Viseu, and Almeida (north of the Tagus), and part by Alcantara (south of the Tagus) and Coria—upon Ciudad-Rodrigo, and thence to Salamanca. Only the light baggage and ammunition for immediate use were to be sent with this portion of the force.

The artillery, the cavalry, and a park of several hundred carriages, were to go round south of the Tagus by Elvas, and Badajoz, cross the river at

Oct. 27,  
1808

Almaraz, and thence move by Talavera, Madrid, and the Escorial Pass—a detour which added some miles to their march—and so unite with the main body at Valladolid, Salamanca, or wherever was decided. This division of the force was placed under Sir John Hope. The bulk of the ammunition was to go with it.

Magazines were to be formed at Almeida, and reserve stores and provisions were directed to that point.

It has been said that Moore intended, from the first, to collect *all* his forces together at Salamanca, but his actual intention is given clearly in the following extract from his *Diary*, written just after leaving Lisbon on October 27th, 1808 :

“All the troops are out of Lisbon except two regiments, which will march to-morrow and the next day. I go to meet the troops\* as they arrive by their different routes at Almeida, and shall collect them at Ciudad-Rodrigo and Salamanca, and wait until Hope’s and Sir David Baird’s corps get to Astorga and Espinar;† where, according to circumstances, I can direct the junction of the whole at Valladolid, Burgos, or wherever else is thought best.”—*Diary of Sir John Moore*, edited by Sir J. F. Maurice.

He had previously also, on October 22nd, written to Lord W. Bentinck that Hope was marching on Madrid and Valladolid, and that he was to hear from him as he got near Madrid, and would then determine the point of junction. The point of

\* His own columns

† Hope was moving on Espinar, Baird on Astorga.

concentration of the whole, therefore, was not at Nov. 9-26, 1808  
the moment of marching decided.

The great difficulty in obtaining any description of carriage hampered Sir John Moore, and compelled him to move his troops in small successive divisions.

Baird could not set out from Corunna until about November 9th, and then was obliged to march by but half a battalion at a time and hire carts day by day.

Sir John Hope, also (being in want of money and supplies, and losing many horses from glanders), was forced to move by six successive divisions, each one day's march behind the other.

In consequence of these many impediments to the concentration of the army, and in consequence also of Napoleon's successful advance upon Madrid, Moore's hopes that he could concentrate without opposition from the enemy were disappointed. On reaching Salamanca himself, he found (November 15th) that the French had entered Valladolid. He then wished to concentrate at Salamanca, but wrote to Baird and Hope to use their discretion as to whether this could be carried out and how to act. We then find the British forces, on November 26th, 1808, separated in the following manner, in dangerous proximity to the enemy.

Moore at Salamanca.

Baird at Astorga, with his rear far behind,  
beyond Lugo.

Hope approaching the Escorial Pass, with his  
rear at Talavera.

Nov. 28  
1808

On the same day, Napoleon, having dispersed the Spanish armies, was near Aranda, on the road to Madrid, and a French corps, under Lefebvre (about 30,000, *i.e.* equal in strength to Baird's and Moore's forces united), was descending the Carrion river towards Valladolid, which was occupied by advanced detachments.

Napoleon was ignorant of the proximity of the British; and Sir John Moore, on his part, was unaware of the exact position and great strength of the French.

On November 28th the British position became still more critical, for they retained much the same places, having delayed in order to close up the columns, and the French had moved forward.

Baird was still at Astorga waiting for his rear to close up.

Hope marching over the Escorial Pass, having halted for his rear.

Moore at Salamanca.

Napoleon at Aranda.

Lefebvre's corps, with a strong force of cavalry, was at Palencia and Valladolid, and had patrols close to Arevalo. Some French troops were also at Segovia.

On this date despatches reached both Moore and Hope, informing them of Napoleon's approach, and some successes of his against the Spaniards; and it became evident to Moore that his position was one of peril. He therefore ordered Baird to fall back towards Corunna or Vigo; and resolved himself—after endeavouring to effect his junction with Hope—to retire into Portugal.

The situation of Hope was now critical. If he advanced he would have to make a flank movement of three days, with a heavy convoy, over a flat country, in presence of a powerful cavalry; if he delayed, a strong French corps would attack him; and, if he retreated, he would leave Moore at Salamanca without artillery or ammunition. The latter consideration outweighed all others, so without hesitation he pushed on, and succeeded in gaining Avila, across country, eventually reaching Sir John Moore in safety.

Nov. 28  
Dec. 13,  
1808

Moore's determination to retreat created very general indignation in Spain. Madrid was said to be making a desperate stand against Napoleon. As a matter of fact, it had fallen to him in two days; but, in the belief that it was holding out, Moore determined to make an attempt to concentrate with Baird at Valladolid, and then to boldly threaten the French flank and line of supplies in the direction of Burgos. By this, more than any other mode of action, he considered that he could aid the Spaniards and give their armies time to assemble, as Napoleon would, no doubt, turn from his advance to the south of Spain and Lisbon in order to attack him.

He therefore sent fresh orders to Baird to advance, but at the same time, as he saw that the whole army might soon be compelled to retire, he made preparations for a retreat towards Corunna or Vigo, by directing magazines to be established at Benevente, Astorga, and Lugo. On December 11th he moved towards Valladolid, and on the 13th reached Toro and other points upon the River

Dec. 13-  
23, 1808

Douro, when an intercepted French despatch fell into his hands.

From this despatch he learnt that Madrid had fallen on December 4th, 1808, and that the French Emperor was distributing his armies in every direction; that Lefebvre was already at Talavera on his road towards Lisbon; and that Marshal Soult's corps had been ordered to move from the Carrion river, upon Benevente and the province of Galicia. He learnt also that the French had no idea of his own proximity, and that Soult's corps was weak and comparatively isolated.

He therefore determined to endeavour to surprise Soult's corps. It was settled that the army, if it fell back, should retreat by the roads through Galicia; transports were directed to sail up the coast towards Vigo, and Baird to move in the direction of Mayorga instead of Valladolid. It was arranged, too, that some Asturian and Galician levies were to co-operate from the north, which they partially did; but it may be said here that their movements had no effect of any consequence in aiding the operations of Moore.

The concentration between Baird and Moore was accomplished successfully on December 20th, near Mayorga. Headquarters were established at Sahagun, where in a brilliant cavalry combat 400 British cavalry defeated 700 of the French; and the united force was now in numbers superior to the corps of Soult.

Moore then advanced, and on the night of the 23rd was close to and preparing to attack Soult; but though Soult's position was a somewhat

dangerous one, that of the British army was becoming even more critical. Both Soult and Napoleon had become aware of the exposed situation of Moore. The former had urgently demanded reinforcements, and Napoleon, having changed all his plans, was endeavouring, with surprising energy, to surround his enemy. He had ordered Soult, after being reinforced, to march on Astorga, and Lefebvre's corps at Talavera to Salamanca, while he himself, with 50,000 men and 150 guns, had left Madrid on December 22nd; and although the Escorial Pass was choked with snow and most difficult of passage, arrived on the 26th at Tordesillas, on the Douro, cavalry scouts being pushed forward towards Benevente. He had thus, in less than five days, in winter and across high mountains, traversed more than 100 miles of ground.

The destruction of the British he now considered as almost certain. From Tordesillas he wrote to Soult thus: "Our cavalry scouts are already at Benevente; if the English pass to-day in their position they are lost; if they attack you in force, retire a day's march; the further they proceed, the better for us."

But he was some few hours too late. On that very day (December 26th, 1808) Moore had retired before Soult, and crossed the River Esla. On the night of the 23rd, just before attacking Soult, he had learnt his danger, and by falling back at once had saved his army; the troops, while passing the river near Benevente, being attacked and harassed by the enemy's horsemen, who captured



Dec. 1808 some of the baggage. The main body of the army crossed near Benevente by a bridge afterwards destroyed, and portions at other points. At this period of the retreat (as before at Sahagun), the British Hussar Brigade (7th, 10th, and 15th Hussars) especially distinguished itself in combats with the French cavalry.

When once across the Esla, Moore delayed for a short time to destroy some stores, and clear out the magazine at Benevente, and then commenced a rapid retreat through Astorga towards Corunna ; but this delay was sufficient to bring the headquarters of Napoleon close to Benevente. Fortunately, a flood had caused the Esla to rise and become unfordable, and the French lost twenty-four hours before they could repair the destroyed bridge. It now was deemed important by Moore to gain the mountainous country beyond Astorga, where his army would be in comparative safety from cavalry ; and the troops were for this reason hurried on with great celerity, the sick being left in rear, and a quantity of stores destroyed. These forced marches, the want of regular supplies, the inclement weather, and the sense of almost running before the enemy, combined to shake the discipline of the army at times to a deplorable degree. Excesses and insubordination were the consequence, and the "retreat to Corunna" was at first marked by great disorder. We need not enlarge upon this further than to say that the Returns show that those regiments in which the disciplinary standard was recognized to be high, and in which the officers paid great attention to their men,

although they were among those most heavily engaged, suffered comparatively less than others. Dec. 1808  
Jan. 1809  
Where discipline was relaxed the men broke out of the ranks, entering houses in search of food or drink, and numbers of these stragglers were killed by the enemy (Oman's *History of the War*, vol. i. p. 566). Napoleon pursued incessantly, and on January 1st, 1809, arrived at Astorga. Here, however, he received a despatch disclosing to him some preparations for war on the part of Austria, and certain intrigues going on in Paris. On this account, and seeing that he could not now hope to surround Moore, he at once turned back and set off for France, taking with him a large portion of his army, and entrusting the pursuit of the British to Soult, who had with him about 47,000 men.

Soult, Duke of Dalmatia, held a high reputation as a general, and, anxious to destroy the British force, he pressed Moore with vigour.

Against him Moore showed a bold front, making a stand at Lugo and other points, and this restored the spirit of the troops. The retreat became more orderly, and at last, after great hardships, the British force reached Corunna; a small portion of it having been detached, during the retreat, by Orense, upon Vigo, and the transports ordered up from the latter place to Corunna. In consequence of contrary winds, these transports did not appear until three days after Sir John Moore's army had arrived. A portion of the force had embarked,

Jan. 16, 1809, when Soult attacked the remainder and brought on the

## BATTLE OF CORUNNA

*January 16th, 1809*

(See plan facing page 76)

In this battle the French numbered about 20,000, with 40 guns, of which 11 were of heavy calibre; the British under 15,000, with only 9 light guns.

The position taken up by Moore to cover the embarkation was at about a mile and a half from the harbour of Corunna, astride of the main road leading to it from Lugo. It was the best which offered for his purpose, and was in itself a fairly good one, running along a range of rocky hills, which extended on his right to a valley leading down to the harbour, and which, near his left, abutted on to the Mero, a tidal river issuing in the sea.

But it is not sufficient that a position should have certain good points if these can be more or less neutralized by an enemy in possession of a still better position in its neighbourhood; nor can this disadvantage be overcome by occupying this better position instead, unless the force available is sufficient in numbers to occupy it adequately, and prevent it being pierced or turned.

Moore's position at Corunna illustrates this. In front of him, at a distance of under a mile, ran another parallel and somewhat higher range of hills, terminating, as his own position did, in the valley at one end and the Mero at the other. On the left of this position, opposite Moore's right, was

an isolated rocky height from which guns could be brought to bear upon Moore's right and centre.

Jan. 16,  
1809

Soult, when he came up, occupied this range ; his 11 heavy guns were placed on the rocky height, and his cavalry occupied the lower slopes of the valley on his left. In the low ground between the opposing armies were two or three villages—Elmina, Portoso, and Abaxo—of which Elmina, opposite Moore's right centre, was occupied by the British, and the others seized by the French.

The French position was the dominating one ; but on account of its greater extent and distance from the harbour, Moore refrained from occupying it, deeming it less suitable to the numbers and purpose of his force. One great danger he had to fear was that his right might be turned along the valley and hills beyond it, and that the enemy might thus interpose himself between him and the harbour. Distance from the harbour would have increased this danger.

Thus circumstances compelled Moore to fight, in what was, relatively to the French, a disadvantageous position. But he made the best of his ground, with a display of light troops on his right where his line was thin, to deter the enemy from an attempt to pass his right ; and keeping two divisions in reserve, he trusted to Baird and Hope on the high ground to repulse Soult's columns should they assault his centre and left.

And his plan was this: not simply to fight a defensive action, but, should opportunity offer, and the French attacks be repelled, to advance with

Jan. 16,  
1809

all the troops he could spare up the valley on his right, carry, if possible, the isolated hill on which the French guns were, and then, assuming the offensive against Soult's left flank, roll back his army upon the Mero.

What actually took place was that Soult's columns, at about 2 p.m., attempted with all their force and energy to carry the heights, and their guns caused great loss to Moore. They drove the British out of Elmina ; but, as at Vimiera, so here, they were repulsed from the high ground with carnage by the opposing British line. They also advanced down the valley by the British right, but being checked by the opposition they received, halted and hesitated.

The struggle was determined and prolonged, but in the end Elmina and the other villages were retaken, and the French were repulsed ; the order for the advance up the valley had been given, and the British troops were pressing towards the isolated hill, when Moore was mortally wounded.

General Baird, second in command, was struck down also, and these occurrences caused, naturally, hesitation and delay in conveying orders.

Night was now approaching, and General Hope, upon whom the command then devolved, deemed it more prudent to suspend the advance, and, profiting by the confusion of the French, embark the army without loss.

This was done. The British sailed from Spain ; and Soult's army, though beaten back, was not entirely crushed.

The British loss at Corunna was under 1,000, <sup>Jan. 16,</sup> that of the French about 2,000. "Sahagun," <sup>1809</sup> "Benevente," and "Corunna," as bars to the Peninsular medal and battle-honours, commemorate the campaign.

Had Moore lived, it is probable that the French defeat would have been complete. He would doubtless have endeavoured to carry through his intended counter-stroke; and as it has since become known that the French ammunition was almost exhausted, and their troops had been severely handled, the chances are that they could never, with guns and baggage, have passed the Mero, which was in full tide, and over which one bridge alone could be used for retreat.

"The heroic spirit of Moore," writes Napier, "went with the troops; his body rested with the enemy." He survived, however, sufficiently long to know of the French repulse, and to hope that "his country would do him justice."

Moore was a great general, with many noble qualities as a man, and as an organizer and a trainer of troops he was far in advance of his time. The regiments which he led in Egypt and elsewhere, and especially those of the "Light Division," which he personally trained at the camp at Shorncliffe in 1805, and which afterwards, under both him and Wellington, fought so well in the Peninsula, form the best testimony to his exceptional ability.

Wherever his influence reached he inculcated a firm but not harsh discipline, responsibility in each rank for its special duties, and the importance of

officers both knowing their own work and interesting themselves personally in their men. That influence is felt in more than one British regiment to the present day, and the name of Sir John Moore will never be forgotten in the British army.

“Great as a soldier, great as a patriot, and even greater as a man.”—*Diary of Sir John Moore*, edited by Sir J. F. Maurice, 1904.

#### COMMENTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

What we have said as to the battle of Corunna leads us to add here a few words as to what is meant by a “counter-stroke” in war. It means meeting the enemy not by a merely passive defence, but by striking at him, as when a swordsman defending himself does not content himself with guards alone, but strikes at his opponent.

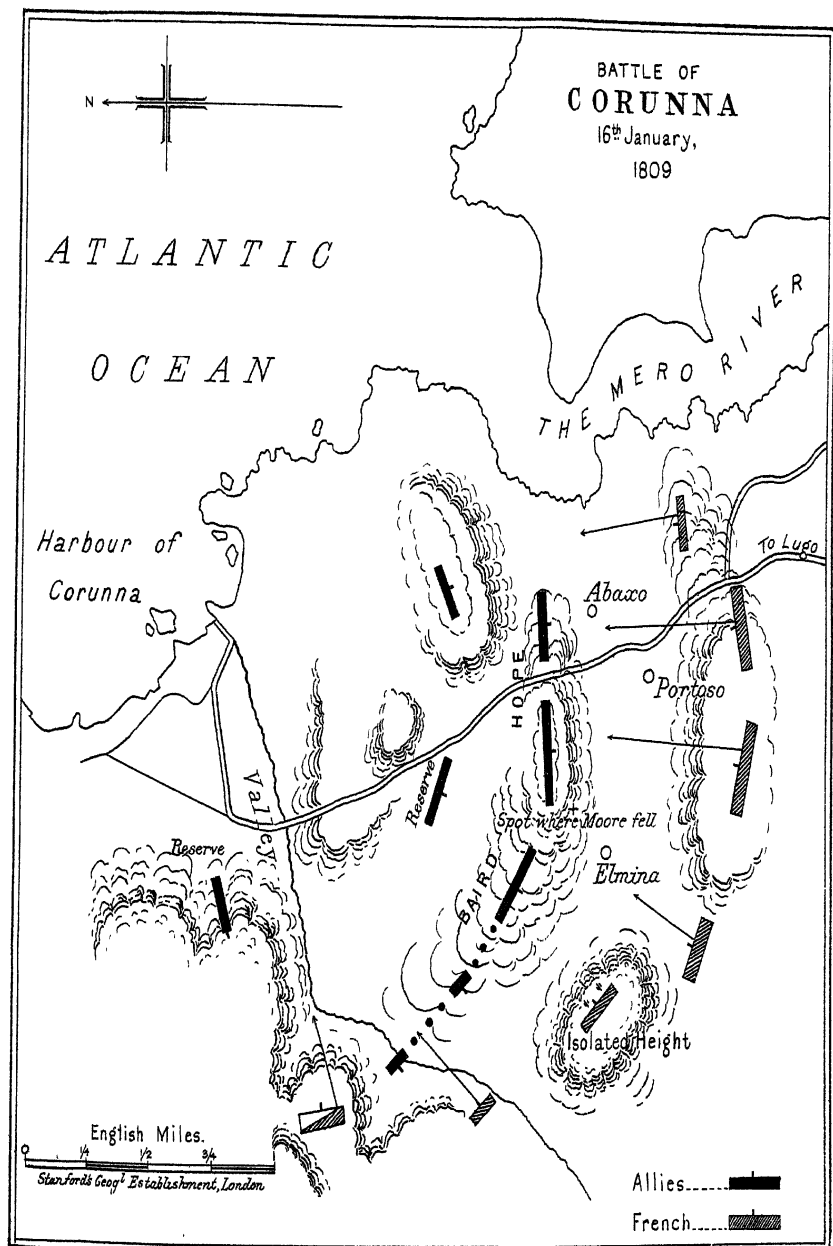
In the “strategy,” or larger movements of this campaign, Moore defended Spain by striking at Napoleon’s communications, and was successful. In this battle he would probably, had he lived, have been as successful in the counter-stroke he had contemplated against Soult (by his attack on the isolated hill), and have driven him on to the Mero.

Defence, to be of the most effective description, must be an active and not a merely passive one. Wellington is said sometimes to have fought as a rule “defensive battles,” and this is true, because the limited strength of his army and the object he had in view generally imposed this upon him. But of all generals (as these campaigns will show) he was the quickest to pass at the right time from the defensive to the offensive, and attack his











opponent. When his adversary offered any opening he was upon him in an instant, and it is the power to at once seize an opening which makes the great leader, and often turns defeat into a rout.

In this campaign the British army was at the outset advancing by a *double line of operations*; for the cavalry and artillery, under Hope, were merely a part or detachment of Moore's force, and the army was divided into two portions, which were complete in themselves—viz. those under Moore and Baird. These two portions were moving from Lisbon and Corunna, points widely separated from each other, and eventually Salamanca became the point where they were hoping to concentrate.

In war, so long as the various columns composing an army move in one general direction and keep up a constant communication with each other (*although the column may be marching upon many roads*), then the army is said to be advancing by a *single line of operations*. When, however, an army is divided into *two or three distinct portions complete in themselves* (i.e. something more than mere detachments), and so separated by distance or the nature of the country that they cannot preserve any regular communication, then the army is said to be advancing by a *double* (or *treble*) *line of operations*, as the case may be.

When an army is thus moving by a double (or treble) line, either each portion of it ought, in order to be safe, to be made so strong that it can oppose by itself the whole force of the enemy; or the point where the separated portions can unite

together, called technically the "*point of concentration*," should be so situated that the enemy cannot attack either portion before it has reached it. Bearing this in mind, let us consider the position of the British and French armies on November 28th, 1808.

On that day, Baird was at Astorga, *five* marches from Salamanca, with his rear not yet closed up.

Hope was at the Escorial Pass, *six* marches from Salamanca.

Lefebvre's strong corps was—part at *Valladolid*, *only three\** marches from Salamanca, and part at Palencia—and had pushed out patrols almost to Arevalo. Some French were also at Segovia.

Moore himself was at Salamanca.

Thus a considerable portion of the French army was on this day actually much nearer to Salamanca than Baird or Hope; and had Napoleon been aware in time of the British movements, he might have fallen upon Moore at Salamanca with a powerful force, before either Baird could have joined him or Sir J. Hope, with his artillery, cavalry, and ammunition, have arrived. All three of the separated fractions of the British army were in danger of being attacked at a disadvantage.

Thus Salamanca had become, under the circumstances of the French position, not a safe point of

\* The distance in marches are taken from "Napier." It required, it appears, twice as long to reach Salamanca from the Escorial Pass as from Valladolid, although the distance as the crow flies is not much farther from the former place than from the latter. The nature of the country would account for this. This fact is an illustration of the necessity in military operations of considering distances in relation to the time it takes to march over them, and not according to the mere number of miles.

concentration, and under other circumstances than those which actually prevailed blame might fairly be attached to the leader of an army who had placed it in the position held by the British on November 28th; but in this particular instance it cannot be imputed to Sir John Moore. The Government had sent Baird's force to Corunna, and had ordered Moore to join it, and aid the Spaniards. Baird writes to Moore, November 28th, 1808: "I know that you should have landed at Cadiz, and I should have met you at Seville, where the army could have been united and equipped, but it was ordered otherwise." He had the choice of but two alternatives; either to unite his own troops to those of Baird by sea—which, for reasons already given, he deemed inexpedient—or advance as he did. He had no intelligence from the Spanish Government of the passage of Napoleon's immense army over the Pyrenees, but had heard only that large Spanish forces were facing the French, under Joseph, upon the Ebro. He had every reason to hope that he might concentrate with Baird in safety; and with regard to the separation of the cavalry and artillery under Hope, he had been assured, on all sides, that guns could not move upon the roads north of the Tagus, especially at that season.

In reading military works, it is very common to meet with the expression, that a general had the advantage of "*interior lines*." This is merely a technical way of saying that he could, by reason of his occupying a central or interior position with

regard to the points held by his enemy, bring a larger force against some one or other of these points than the enemy could there collect in time to oppose him.

Lefebvre, when about Valladolid on November 28th, 1808, had, though without knowing it, the advantage of "interior lines" over Moore, for he could have attacked the latter with a superior force at Salamanca, before either Sir John Hope or Sir David Baird could have succoured him.

When Moore, on advancing towards Valladolid, on December 11th, 1808, ordered magazines to be formed at Benevente, Astorga, and Lugo, and arranged, in case of necessity, for his ships to come round to some spot (such as Corunna) upon the coast of Galicia, he showed prudence and forethought. His retreat was deliberately planned, not unexpectedly forced upon him; and the wisdom of the precaution he took was exemplified when Napoleon subsequently cut him off from a retreat into Portugal.

Moore's *base was then changed* from Lisbon to Corunna, and the army was saved by retiring upon this line—the magazines which had been provided contributing to its sustenance. To be able thus to change a base in war is an evident advantage to a general, gives him a great degree of independence, and multiplies the directions in which he can with safety act against the enemy. It is, however, comparatively seldom that such a change can be made, especially in an emergency. Sea power in this case rendered it possible, and it is the command of the sea above everything else which

confers it. Illustrations of the important value to Great Britain of this command of the sea, for offence as well as defence, are afforded by this change of Moore's base from Lisbon to Corunna, and by the change of base by Lord Wolseley in one night from Alexandria to Ismailia, in the Egyptian War of 1882, as well as by many other campaigns.

When Moore determined, after receiving the intercepted French despatch on December 13th, 1808, to attack Soult's corps on the Carrion river, there was a *greater intention* in the attack than merely to defeat Soult. By its direction alone it was *menacing to the French communications*, and it was designed to draw Napoleon, if possible, from the south, and to turn the corps at Talavera from its march towards Lisbon ; thus saving, at all events for a time, both Andalusia and Portugal from invasion. This able stroke fully succeeded. It is probable that the bold nature of the act made Napoleon suppose that the British forces were more numerous than they were ; but he certainly *arrested the movement of all his corps*, turned that at Talavera towards the north, and marched against Moore. He was thus, by this *threatened attack upon his line of supplies*, drawn away from the richest provinces of Spain ; and, as he shortly afterwards set out for Austria (having had no time to carry out his plans in Spain, and leaving the conduct of the war in other and less gifted hands) the value of this counter-stroke to the Peninsula was much more than a temporary one. It " saved the south of Spain, had the most important bearing



on the final issue of the great Continental struggle, and won from Napoleon himself the tribute of unqualified approval."—*Memoir of John Hookham Frere*, by Sir Bartle Frere.

The direction of Napoleon's march, when he set out from Madrid against Moore, should also be particularly noticed. It was a struggle to cut off the British general from *his* communications, and to interpose between him and his lines of retreat, both to Lisbon and Corunna. He therefore went straight towards Tordesillas and Benevente. At the former point he had cut Moore off from Salamanca and Lisbon. If he had gained Benevente *before* Moore, he would then have been nearer to Corunna than the latter. He was a few hours too late ; and the English army slipped out of his hand.

It should be noticed that the mountainous country of Galicia, though increasing the hardships of the retreat, was yet favourable to Moore. The narrow mountain gorges offered positions where he could retard the pursuit of large numbers, and in which the French cavalry was almost valueless.

The inconvenience, and even danger, caused by a deficiency of supplies and transport, and the want of any organized supply and transport train, which at this period had not been got together, are illustrated in the delays at the commencement of this campaign. Nothing ties an army down so completely as a want of stores (food, ammunition, etc.) or transport. It cannot move freely until it gets them. It is the same thing now as it was in

the days of Moore. The defeat of the French in the war of 1870-71 may be fairly ascribed to their being found, when war broke out, unequal to the task of rapidly supplying and moving their troops ; and had our army in South Africa, in the earlier stages of the recent war, been able to move more rapidly, it would have been an enormous advantage to those commanding it and to the country.

The difficulty of obtaining accurate information regarding an enemy's position in time of war is shown. The Spanish peasantry were, as a body, friendly to the British ; yet the first intelligence which Sir John Moore (less than 150 miles from Madrid) received of the capture of that city, reached him through an enemy's intercepted despatch, some nine days after the city had fallen. An intelligence department (*i.e.* a department organized for the sole purpose of obtaining information) has always been a necessity to an army. Telegraphs, railways, steamers, and other means of quickly transmitting intelligence, have not altered this. The Austrians at Kœniggrätz, in 1866, and MacMahon at Wörth, in 1870, were both completely ignorant of the near neighbourhood of large bodies of the enemy. Our experience in South Africa affords many illustrations of the same thing.

There are two or three examples also of the influence which purely accidental circumstances have in war. The interception of the French despatch—which happened, by the way, merely in consequence of the officer who carried it having

quarrelled with the postmaster of a village about post-horses, and been killed in the brawl—the flooding of the Esla; the news from Austria arriving just in time to turn Napoleon back from Astorga; all these matters bore most importantly upon the final result of the operations.

As an instance of an extraordinary march, that of Napoleon from Madrid to Astorga is almost without parallel. In ten days he marched his 50,000 men 200 miles, crossing a mountain range by a pass covered with snow, and out of this a whole day was lost at the River Esla. To march a large army in a campaign nearly 23 miles a day, and to feed it, for several days in succession, in bad weather, is a difficult feat of war.

The retreat from Corunna caused much despondency in England, and Sir John Moore's conduct of the campaign was at first blamed; but his countrymen, as a body, have long since done him justice. He had accomplished all that, under the circumstances, was possible. He had turned Napoleon, commanding a force immeasurably superior to his, from his march towards Andalusia and Portugal, thwarted his schemes for the conquest of Spain, and saved his own army from destruction.

After the embarkation of Moore's force the ships were scattered by a storm, and the troops reached England in great distress. Only a few thousand British soldiers now remained in the Peninsula, and the French overran all the northern and

central parts of Spain. Still the struggle was not abandoned, and Sir Arthur Wellesley was again sent out to Portugal, the exceptional genius for war of the latter being clearly illustrated by the plans he drew up about this period for the defence of Portugal, and which he afterwards so ably carried out.

Before passing on from the Corunna campaign, we may mention that some writers have implied that Moore advanced to Mayorga and Sahagun under pressure from others, and against his own judgment. Doubtless several in Spain, unaware of the true military situation, with no responsibility for the British troops, and with faith in the power of the Spanish armies, urged an advance against the enemy.

Experience of other campaigns has shown that in this there is nothing unusual, and it can hardly have decided the plans of a soldier and leader such as Moore.

Moore's military reputation stands so deservedly high because, while clearly seeing his danger, feeling his responsibility and expecting little Spanish aid, he knowingly, though reluctantly, ran the risk he did for a great end, which end he attained, though in attaining it he lost his life.

## CHAPTER V

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### CAMPAIGN IN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN, 1809 (FIRST PERIOD)

#### ADVANCE AGAINST SOULT—PASSAGE OF THE DOURO —EXPULSION OF THE FRENCH A SECOND TIME FROM PORTUGAL

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SIR ARTHUR WELLESLEY landed for the second time in Portugal on April 22nd, 1809, more than three months after the embarkation of Sir John Moore's army at Corunna, and assumed command of the Allied forces. In this interval the situation of affairs in the Peninsula had undergone great changes, which we must briefly describe.

Napoleon, though he had left the Peninsula for France, still endeavoured to carry on from a distance the operations of his army in Spain; and for this reason the French marshals who were in command of the various corps composing it, were permitted to correspond directly with him, through the minister of war in France. Thus, though they were placed nominally under the supreme command of Joseph, the Emperor's brother, at Madrid, to whom instructions were imparted as to the future

conduct of the war, they were in reality, in a great measure, independent of him.

Jan. to  
April  
1809

The French forces in Spain had been sensibly diminished by the troops which Napoleon had taken away with him, but were still very large; for, after deductions had been made for the garrisons of important places and for detachments to guard the communications, there still remained about 100,000 men available for field operations in the distant parts of the Peninsula.

Three French armies were set apart for the subjugation of Portugal and Andalusia, including the reduction of the cities of Lisbon, Seville, and Cadiz. These far outnumbered the handful of Allied troops which, at the conclusion of the Corunna campaign, remained in Portugal, and were concentrated principally about Lisbon. These three armies were:—

Marshal Soult, in Galicia.

General Lapisse, at Salamanca.

Marshal Victor, near Talavera.

The plan of campaign which they were directed to carry out was this:—

Soult was to invade Portugal from the north, capture Oporto, and march upon Lisbon.

Lapisse was to set out from Salamanca, and, by following the road through Ciudad-Rodrigo to Abrantes, clear the country upon his left flank.

Victor was to move upon Merida, taking with him a siege train for the subsequent reduction of Cadiz; and after the capture of Lisbon, Lapisse and Victor, joining together, were to march into Andalusia, to conquer that province.

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Jan. to  
April  
1809

Joseph was in readiness, with a large force at Madrid, to strengthen or succour any corps which might require it.

Had this combination been rapidly carried out, the Allies in Portugal could hardly have resisted it ; but it was not so carried out.

Soult could not march as soon as ordered, for he had many men in hospital ; his gun-carriages required repair ; his ammunition was running short ; his soldiers were in want of shoes and equipment ; and he had little money. The rainy season was now at its height, and muddy roads and swollen streams retarded his progress. Having passed through Vigo and Tuy, and left garrisons in those places to preserve his communication with Galicia, he attempted to cross the Minho near its mouth. In this attempt he did not succeed, for the river was a raging torrent ; and some Portuguese militia opposing his passage, he was compelled to make a *détour* to Orense, whence he descended upon Chaves, where he established a hospital and *depôt*. From this point he moved by Braga on Oporto. After some bloody contests with the Portuguese troops and peasantry, he captured Oporto on March 29th, 1809.

It had been expected that he would have reached this place several weeks earlier ; and Victor and Lapisse, who had received no intelligence of his movements, had remained in comparative inactivity. Soult also, when he reached Oporto, having no news of Victor or Lapisse, halted in that city, hesitating to advance further.

Thus the French marshals, acted without concert

and undecidedly, not aiding one another, and not pushing forward with energy. It was about this time also that they first began to give evidence of a wish to evade the authority of Joseph and of the existence of a jealous feeling among themselves, while there is a doubt whether Soult was not more or less intriguing with a party who were desirous of creating him King of Northern Lusitania (Oman's *History of the Peninsular War*, vol. ii. p. 274, etc.). Left to a great extent in independent command by Napoleon, and ranking, with some justice, the military talents of Joseph beneath their own, these marshals frequently remonstrated against the latter's decisions, and found pretexts for neglecting his orders. Ambitious, too, of personal distinction, they were reluctant to serve under one another (thus occupying a subordinate position) for the common good, and as a result of this want of union, and of the difficulty of procuring information in a hostile country, the French armies moved slowly and without concert.

After Sir Arthur Wellesley landed (April 22nd, 1809) they held the following positions :—

Soult, about 20,000, still at Oporto, but the Spanish and Portuguese insurgents had closed upon his rear, and taken Vigo, containing the military chest, and Chaves with its magazines.

A part of his force (under General Loison) had just been detached to Amarante, on the River Tamega, to keep open the road to Braganza, which crosses the river at that point. It was an object to Soult that this especial line of retreat



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April 22,  
1809

should be kept open, for feeling unsafe with regard to his position, and despairing of reaching Lisbon, he began to meditate a move by Braganza towards Salamanca and Ciudad-Rodrigo, whence he could more readily communicate with Victor.

Victor and Lapisse were both near Merida, having *united together*; for the former had refused to advance until the latter had been ordered by Joseph to join him from Salamanca. They numbered jointly about 30,000 men, Victor being in command.

It is now time to sketch the changes which had taken place in the situation of the British and their allies.

When the victories of Napoleon over the Spaniards, the retreat of Sir John Moore to Corunna, and the approach of the French armies towards Portugal became known in rapid succession in the latter country, consternation was at first general.

But as time went on, and the French did not approach, preparations were made for resistance. The Portuguese requested that British officers might be appointed to the higher commissions in their army, and a disciplined and organized force, commanded by Marshal Beresford, and of which each battalion was placed under a British officer, was soon in the field.

The militia was called out, volunteer corps were enrolled, reinforcements were sent from England, and the wrecks of the Spanish armies, which had

suffered many reverses and been driven south of Tagus, began again to collect under arms. April 22,  
1809

The Allied forces, then, at the date of Sir Arthur Wellesley's landing, held the following positions :—

The British (including German auxiliaries) 25,000 strong, were at Leirya.

Beresford's Portuguese troops, 16,000, about Thomar.

The Portuguese militia and levies, a few thousands, principally in the north of Portugal, observing Soult, a force under Silveira being at Amarante, on the River Tamega.

The Spanish troops were assembling in numbers, under General Cuesta, to the southward of Merida, and also under Venegas in Andalusia, near Carolina.

After his arrival in Portugal, Sir Arthur Wellesley had to decide against which of the French marshals (*i.e.* Soult or Victor) he would advance, and he determined to march against Soult; but in order to provide for the safety of Lisbon during his absence, he sent a small force of British to be joined by Portuguese, over 10,000 in all, to Abrantes and Alcantara, and gave directions,—(1) that if Victor, moving northward, should endeavour to cross the Tagus and follow the road on the right bank to Lisbon, the bridges were to be destroyed and his progress opposed; (2) that if he should advance by Badajoz, the force at Abrantes was to fall back on Lisbon, and Cuesta with the Spaniards to follow him in the rear.

He incorporated some of Beresford's Portuguese battalions in each British brigade, but left the

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May  
1809

remainder under the personal command of that marshal. Provisions were sent round to the mouth of the Mondego, and on May 5th, 1809, the army, having concentrated at Coimbra, advanced to carry out the following plan of campaign.

Beresford, with 6,000 British and Portuguese, marching by Viseu and Lamego, was to move towards Amarante (see Map III., facing page 102), while Sir Arthur, with about 20,000 men, endeavoured to pass the Douro near Oporto. The object of detaching Beresford was that he might draw off the attention of the French from Sir Arthur, and by cutting off Soult from Braganza, force him northwards and separate him from Victor.

Sir Arthur Wellesley's troops met the advanced posts of Soult some miles south of the Douro, and drove them across that river. Soult now concentrated upon the right bank, about Oporto, and having destroyed the only bridge which existed, and brought over all the boats which he could find to his own side of the stream, believed himself safe, and merely watched the Douro at its mouth, imagining that the British might attempt to cross in that direction by means of their ships.

Sir Arthur had no facilities with his army for throwing a bridge over the Douro, which, opposite Oporto, was very rapid and about 300 yards wide ; yet it was important for him to pass the river at once, for Soult was already making preparations for a retreat towards Braganza, and might fall upon Beresford with overpowering numbers. While reconnoitring Soult's position he discovered that a

ford existed at Avintas, about three miles further up the river. He had, moreover, observed that the French watch above Oporto was a careless one. Soult, convinced, as we have said, that the British would endeavour to pass the river near its mouth—*i.e.* below Oporto—by means of the fishing smacks available there; and having also secured very many (he believed all) of the boats above the city, considered himself safe from surprise in that direction, and took up his station in a house west of Oporto, whence he had a commanding view of the lower course of the river. By good fortune an officer of Sir Arthur's staff had discovered a small skiff on the left bank a short distance above Oporto, and crossing in it unperceived, had managed to find and bring over to the Allied side three large barges.

The Douro—see plan of its passage facing page 96—takes, close above Oporto, a sharp bend round some prominent rocky ground on the left bank, called the Sarea Rock, and opposite to this rock on the right bank is an isolated building called the Seminary. Sir Arthur had noticed that from the Sarea Rock he could sweep the opposite bank with his guns, and that its position hid the passage of the barges [at the dotted line in the plan] from the French in Oporto. Oman, who visited the ground, points out also that the Douro, where the passage was effected, runs between precipitous cliffs nearly 200 feet high, and that an observer on the French side had to come to the very edge of the cliff to see the river at all. Soult apparently had no men so posted, but had his

May  
1809

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May 12,  
1809

outposts some distance back from the cliffs.\* Sir Arthur noticed also that the Seminary was a strong building capable of holding two battalions, and while easily accessible from the river, was surrounded by a high wall on its other three sides. Under these circumstances he collected his troops with secrecy behind the Sarea Rock, placed 18 guns in battery on its summit, and sent General Murray with one brigade to Avintas, with orders to seek for and send down more boats, and then to pass at that point himself, if possible.

Intelligence was soon brought to him that Murray had found boats, and upon the receipt of this Sir Arthur proceeded to carry out one of the most daring passages of a river on record.

### PASSAGE OF THE DOURO

*May 12th, 1809.*

(See plan facing page 96)

Sending an officer and twenty-five men across to the Seminary in one of the barges, he reinforced them as quickly as possible, and three boat-loads had got across before Soult took the alarm. Then the French, streaming out from Oporto, bore down upon the Seminary, and endeavoured to carry it by storm, but the English guns now swept the left of the building, and confined the assault to but one side of it, where the musketry of the defenders drove the French back. In the meantime, the

\* *Peninsular War*, by Charles Oman, 1903, vol. ii. p. 5 (Preface). The precipitous character of the cliffs east of and opposite to the Sarea Rock is indicated by the shading on the plan.

inhabitants of Oporto, glad to be delivered from the French, came over to the left bank with several great boats, and General Sherbrooke, with the Guards, crossing the river in them opposite Oporto, entered the city, passed through it, and took the French in rear, while in the other direction Murray's force soon appeared in sight, coming from Avintas. The French, surprised on all sides, and afraid of being cut off from the road to Amarante, were thrown into confusion ; but at length, abandoning their sick and 50 guns in Oporto, they succeeded in making good their retreat in great disorder past Murray's force. The panic was so great among them, that one squadron of the 14th Dragoons, under Major Hervey, succeeded with little loss in cutting its way through three battalions of infantry marching in a hollow road.

For the passage of the Douro the 14th Hussars and the Buffs bear the battle-honour of "Douro."

The situation of Soult's army was now very critical. The only roads *practicable for guns* by which he could retreat led through Amarante—one by Guimarens upon Braga (see Map III., facing page 102), the other upon Chaves. The British from Oporto could, if they marched northward at once, reach Braga before him, and the Portuguese now held Chaves.

It was already doubtful whether he could succeed in saving his baggage and artillery ; but when, after a few hours' march, he was informed that Loison had retreated from Amarante, and that Beresford was in occupation of that point, he saw

May  
12-16,  
1809

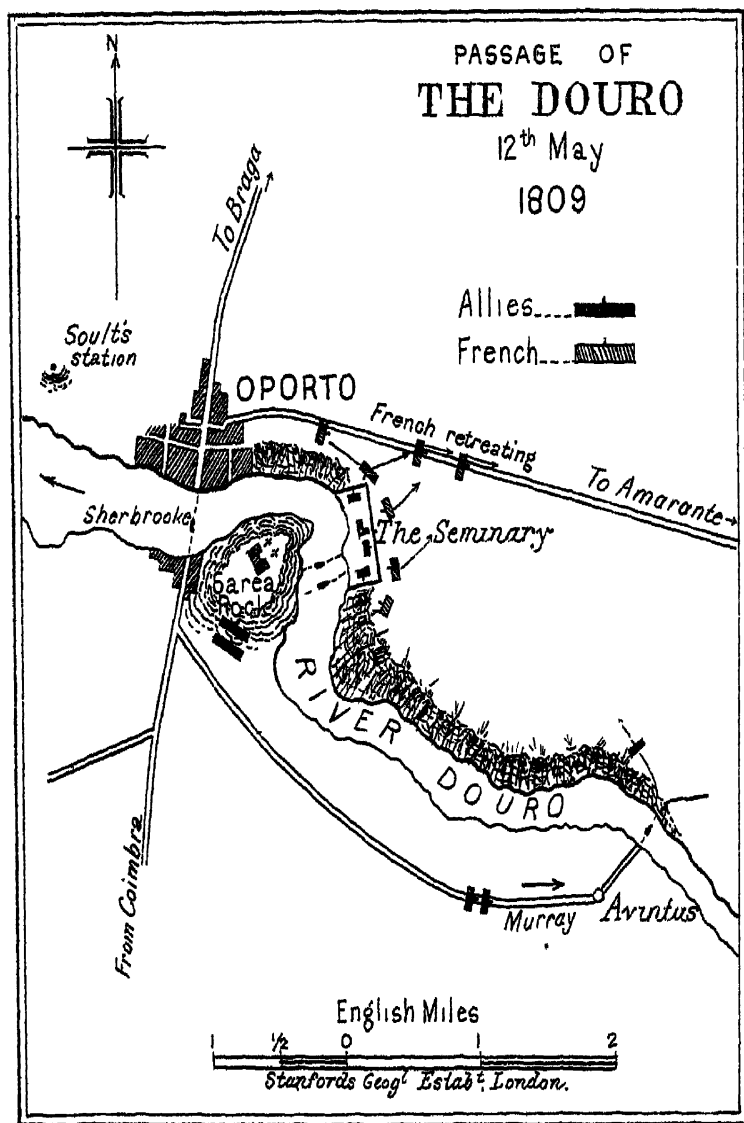
no hope of doing this. From that moment his sole aim was to save his men; and so, destroying all his artillery, and much baggage and ammunition, he took in haste to the mountain paths over the Sierra Catalina on his left, and by following them reached Guimarens, where he was joined by Loison. To understand his movements from this point they must be followed in some detail, but to do this will be repaid by the military lessons which they teach. Still keeping to the mountains he made for Carvalho Este, his object being to avoid both Braga and Chaves and strike up northward through Salamonde, where he would enter the high road to Montalegre. Sir Arthur, in the meantime, had sent orders to Beresford (whom he supposed, as was the case, to be at Amarante), to move upon Chaves, in order to cut Soult off should he attempt to take that road; and to Murray, whose movements after crossing at Avintas had been rather slow and undecided, to make for Guimarens. He himself halted two days at Oporto, and then pushed on to Braga.

On May 15th, 1809, Sir Arthur was at Braga, Murray at Guimarens, and Beresford near Chaves, the latter having upon his march detached some Portuguese to occupy Ruivaens. The capture of Soult now appeared certain; but the French general, on the 16th, came out from the mountains at the point of Salamonde, passing between his pursuers and eluding both Sir Arthur and Beresford.

Still, his chances of final escape were but slender. From Salamonde there were only two lines of retreat into Galicia—one by Ruivaens to Montalegre







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the other by Ponte Nova to Montalegre, the latter passing by a narrow bridge over the mountain torrent of the Cavado, which runs in a deep defile. Soult learnt that the bridge near Ruivaens had been broken by the Portuguese, and so made for that of Ponte Nova, and was fortunate enough to find it partially standing. By a daring night surprise he forced a passage at this point and repaired the bridge, but after this had to fight his way across a second bridge spanning a deep gulf, through which ran an affluent of the Cavado. This bridge was so narrow that only three persons could pass abreast.

While Soult was forcing his way across this, which he did with great bravery, the English guns coming up from Braga opened upon his rear, and the French, crowding together upon the bridge, forced each other in terror into the gulf below, losing many men.

Thus, enduring the extreme of every kind of misery and hardship, Soult escaped finally with the bulk of his men from the Allies, and reached Montalegre on May 18th, just in time to elude Beresford, who was at Chaves—only one march off—on the 17th.

We need follow his subsequent retreat no further than to say that he thence gained Orense, and afterwards Lugo, where he was joined by Ney, "being at this time," says Jomini, "in a far worse condition than General Moore six months earlier."

Immediately after this success against Soult, Sir Arthur was obliged to return to Abrantes, as



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Victor and Lapisse had moved forward and succeeded in forcing the passage of the Tagus at Alcantara, where the bridge—a very old Roman one of great strength—had been partially blown up. Upon the approach of the English general, Victor retired to Talavera, removing a bridge of boats at Almaraz.

The defence of the northern parts of Portugal was now entrusted to the Portuguese levies ; Beresford was sent to Ciudad-Rodrigo ; and Sir Arthur, after a month's delay to reorganize his army and procure money, was again ready to take the field.

### COMMENTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

The reason why Sir Arthur Wellesley at the commencement of the campaign advanced against Soult in preference to Victor should be understood.

Victor, from his position and numerical strength, threatened Lisbon more than Soult, so that a victory over him, by freeing Lisbon and the south of Spain, would, in several respects, have greater results than a success in the north.

But, on the other hand, the recovery of Oporto and of the rich country about the Douro, whence the army could obtain supplies, would raise the spirit of the Portuguese, and be of material advantage to the army. The British, also, might be almost certain of arriving close to the Douro before their march could be made known to Victor ; while Victor at Merida was a long way from Lisbon. There was thus a probability that, should he move from his position, time would be

given for a successful attack against Soult, and the return of the army to oppose him.

The passage of the Douro is not to be considered as a mere instance of good fortune attendant upon hazardous daring. Sir Arthur Wellesley saw the careless watch kept by Soult about Oporto, and took advantage of it. It was *not, however, until he had become aware of Murray's passage* higher up the Douro at Avintas, and of his having found boats, that he ordered his own troops to cross in the barges. He knew then that Murray would soon be in a position to support him, and his acquaintance with the courage of his soldiers fully justified him in believing that until that time they could hold their own. The fire of the artillery from the left bank would aid them in doing so ; the Seminary was a strong building ; and while they occupied it the enemy could not interfere with the passage.

Had Sir Arthur moved his whole army to cross at Avintas, its march would have been discovered ; had he left the portion that did cross there to advance unaided, it would most probably have been overwhelmed and driven back. By the combined passages the French were deceived, a mutual support secured, and a brilliant success realised. The French, writes Oman, " had no conception of the enterprise of the man with whom they had to deal."—*Peninsular War*, vol. ii. p. 333.

General Murray is censured by military writers for want of talent and boldness, in not pressing more rapidly from Avintas upon Soult's columns

## 100 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (1ST PERIOD)

when they were retreating upon the Amarante road. Had he fallen upon them in front while Sir A. Wellesley's troops pressed them in rear, the complete rout of the French must have ensued. The opportunity offered to him, says Napier, "might have tempted a blind man. How would his want of hardihood have appeared if Loison had maintained Amarante? Soult would then have reached Zamora or Salamanca in good order, and have turned on Ciudad-Rodrigo, perhaps have taken it, and would certainly have occupied the British army on that side." This failure upon Murray's part was, however, less serious in its consequences to the Allies, on account of the seizure of Amarante by Beresford.

The delay of Sir Arthur Wellesley (with the main body of the Allies) for two days in Oporto, before pursuing Soult, and the failure of the Allies to intercept the French, either at Salamonde or Montalegre, and so cut them off from Galicia, requires explanation.

The delay at Oporto arose from many causes. The army had already marched eighty miles in four days, skirmishing constantly with the enemy, and the men and animals were exhausted. It had outmarched its ammunition, provisions, and baggage; and the artillery and stores of all kinds had to be brought from the left to the right bank of the Douro. Sir Arthur, also, was unaware of the exact, though he knew the general, position of Beresford, and could not tell whether Soult, if he secured his retreat through Amarante, would

take the direction of Braga or that of Chaves. If he had pursued Soult with his whole force along the narrow road to Amarante, hemmed in between the Sierra Catalina and the Douro, he must have merely followed that marshal (who could move as rapidly as himself) in one column; and he therefore preferred to trust to Murray and Beresford to press upon and intercept the French; while he himself, as soon as he could gain certain intelligence of the direction taken by them, would, by forced marches, endeavour to cut them off either at Braga or Chaves. In the meantime he could give his troops rest, which they stood much in need of, and get over his artillery and stores.

Napier considers that Beresford, had he acted with greater rapidity, might have forestalled Soult, both at Salamonde and Montalegre. He states that Beresford, when he left Amarante (to move towards Chaves, and cut off Soult) had an excellent map of the country to consult, and should have detached a force to occupy Salamonde, seeing the importance of that point, and that there was a direct road (through Freixim) to it. It is a weighty reply, however, to the criticism above-mentioned, that Beresford was making a forced march with tired Portuguese troops, under great difficulties of roads and weather; and that Sir Arthur Wellesley himself says (*Wellington Despatches*, iv. 343) that he (Beresford) anticipated exactly the instructions which he sent to him, and carried them out on his own initiative, thus imputing no want of skill or energy to him. Beresford is also blamed for not having taken more certain



## 102 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (1ST PERIOD)

measures *to ensure the destruction* of the bridge at Ponte Nova, and the second narrow one over which Soult got with so much difficulty. One of his staff officers did attempt, with some Portuguese, to destroy the latter bridge, but he had not means at his disposal to accomplish it in time. Earthworks were thrown up to defend it, but these were carried by the French.

The importance in this campaign of the points of Amarante, Salamonde, and Montalegre is to be noticed.

By the occupation of Amarante, and the destruction of the bridge over the River Tamega, Sir Arthur could close this line of retreat to Soult, and it was thus, even at the beginning of the campaign, “an important strategical point.” But it could not then be termed a “decisive” one, for Soult had *another line of retreat* open to him—viz. that by Braga.

After Sir Arthur, however, had surprised Soult by the passage of the Douro, and *cut him off from Braga*, the point of Amarante became a “decisive” one. Soult’s sole chance of saving his artillery, baggage, or ammunition—that is, of avoiding a ruinous disaster—was that it should be held against the Allies. Sir Arthur, by having secured Amarante, crippled his adversary and decided the campaign.

Loison, the commander of the force which Soult had detached to hold this point, does not appear to have appreciated fully the value of the position, but to have retired before Beresford after a feeble resistance. He should, under the circumstances, have fought for the post to the last extremity; and

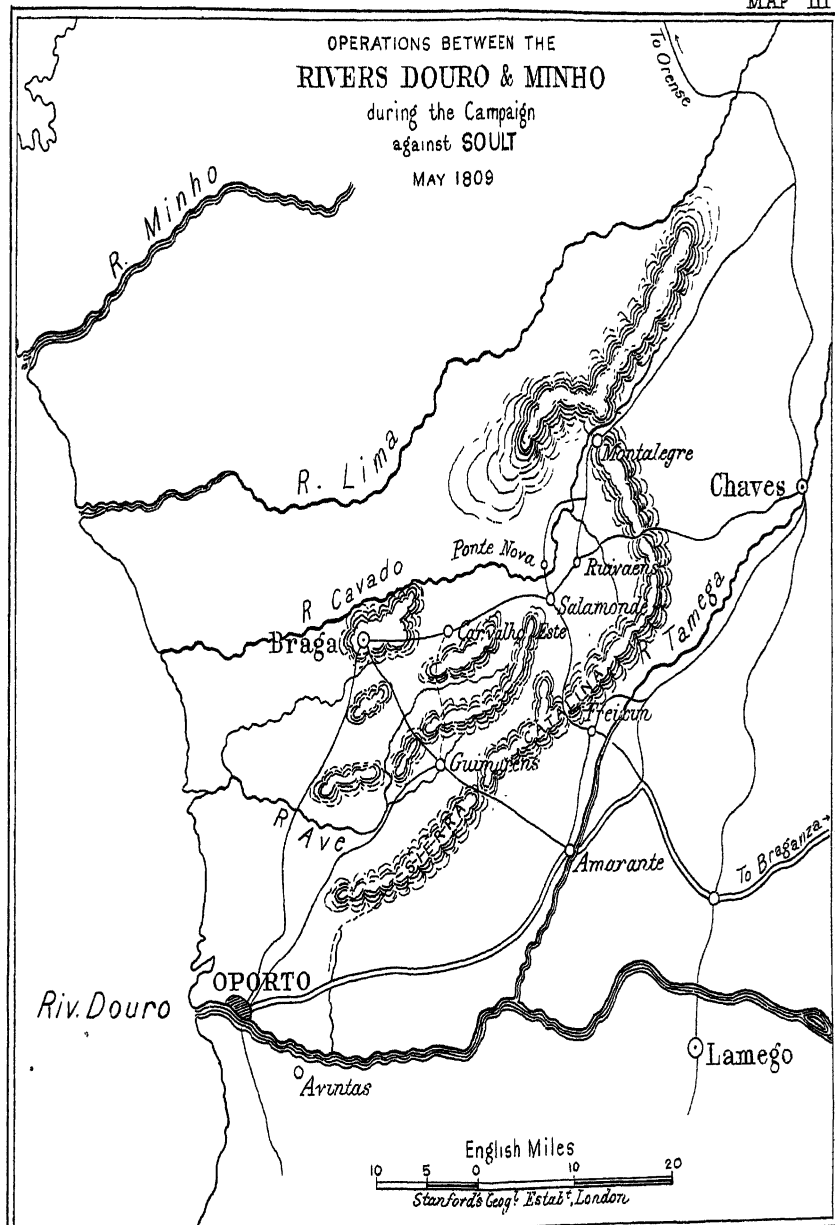




# OPERATIONS BETWEEN THE RIVERS DOURO & MINHO

during the Campaign  
against SOULT

MAY 1809



London : Hugh Rees, Ltd.



when he abandoned it, writes Napier, "he relinquished all claim to military reputation."

When Soult in his retreat was making for Salamonde, and afterwards Montalegre, each of these points became in succession decisive strategical ones—for upon passing them, or failing to do so, depended the possibility of his saving his army.

The marked influence which the topography of the country exercised upon the operations should be noticed. Had it not been for the mountainous character of the country north of the Douro and the absence of many roads across it, what it was possible for both the French and British armies to accomplish would have been entirely different. This well illustrates how essential it is, to the comprehension of military movements, to thoroughly examine and study the theatre of war.

The result of this first period of the campaign of 1809 was to free Portugal for the second time from the French.

## CHAPTER VI

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CAMPAIGN IN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN, 1809  
(SECOND PERIOD)

ADVANCE INTO SPAIN—TALAVERA—RETURN TO  
PORTUGAL

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By the end of June, 1809, the French armies had been reinforced by fresh conscripts, and the positions they had assumed in the Peninsula were as follows :—

Victor near Talavera—25,000.

Joseph, and other French corps, covering Madrid upon the south—nearly 50,000 in all.

Soult, Ney, and Mortier, respectively at Zamora, Astorga, and Valladolid—also about 50,000 in all. The two latter corps had, *unknown* to Sir Arthur Wellesley, been recently ordered by the Emperor to these positions, and the whole were placed under the command of Soult.

In addition to the above forces, other French corps occupied the northern and eastern provinces of Spain, but these were sufficiently employed in defending themselves and their communications from the various bands of Spaniards who, collecting

in large bodies in the mountain ranges, carried on a constant petty warfare,\* capturing convoys and murdering their escorts whenever an opportunity presented itself. The operations of these guerilla bands under Mina, the Empecinado, and various other chieftains, were of great service to Spain; but although these bands were a constant thorn in the side of the French, they never succeeded in thwarting any really important combination of the enemy, having, when joined together in very large bodies, the inconveniences of regular armies without their discipline or unity. For this reason their movements will be but briefly alluded to.

The Allies, also, had obtained some reinforcements, and their positions were:—

Sir Arthur Wellesley, at Abrantes—22,000.

Beresford, with some Portuguese and Spaniards, about Ciudad-Rodrigo—20,000.

Sir Robert Wilson, with some light Portuguese troops (forming the Lusitanian legion), between Salamanca and Avila—4,000.

Cuesta, with a Spanish army, near Mirabete, on the Tagus—about 40,000.

Venegas, with some more Spaniards, near Carolina, in Andalusia—25,000.

A reinforcement of about 8,000 men was also expected up shortly from Lisbon by Sir Arthur, and some of the old regiments which had served under Moore were to form part of this force. Lord Seaton (then Colonel Colborne) writes on

\* Called “guerilla warfare,” from the Spanish word “guerilla,”= “little war.”



## 106 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

June to  
July  
1809

July 9th, 1809: "Sir Arthur Wellesley is now pursuing the French with troops essentially improved at least, if not formed, by Sir John Moore."

While the hostile armies were thus situated, the news of a disastrous check to Napoleon in Austria reached the Peninsula. The battle of Aspern had been fought upon the Danube, and the French arms had experienced a serious—though, as it afterwards proved, but a temporary—defeat. The spirit of the Allies rose high, and the moment appeared an opportune one to strike a blow for the deliverance of Spain.

Sir Arthur Wellesley was, as we have said, unaware of the vicinity of Mortier and Ney to Soult. He considered the latter to *be alone*, and in his decision upon the plan of operations which he now entered upon, this belief, and also some peculiarities connected with the topography of the country, greatly influenced him.

The communications between the province of Leon—where he knew Soult to be—and the valley of the Tagus, were few and indifferent. Over the intervening mountains there were but two passes deemed to be practicable for artillery. These were, *Perales* and *Baños*, through both of which roads descended upon Plasencia. Sir Arthur considered that some Spanish troops detached by Cuesta, and supported by Beresford if necessary, could hold these passes against any attack of Soult, and that his own left flank being thus protected, he might—joining with the main body of Cuesta's

army—advance up the Tagus against Victor and the French near Madrid, while Venegas co-operated by moving against Toledo and Madrid from the south. Sir Robert Wilson was to try to harass Joseph, and distract his attention by moving by the Escorial Pass towards Madrid. July 20,  
1809

Cuesta agreed to this plan ; and it was arranged that the Spaniards should occupy these passes with four battalions, Beresford also having his eye on that of Perales, and that the armies of Cuesta and Sir A. Wellesley should march in concert. On this occasion Sir Arthur Wellesley consented to advance out of Portugal with but scanty means of transport and without establishing magazines, for he had ascertained beforehand that the country was fully capable of sustaining his troops ; had sent on officers to purchase mules ; and had been assured on all sides, by the Spanish authorities, that provisions would be provided.

Sir Arthur marched, according to the plan agreed upon, by Plasencia, and united, on July 20th, 1809, at Oropesa, with Cuesta, the latter having crossed the Tagus at Almaraz (where he restored the bridge of boats) and at Arzobispo. The combined forces then moved against Victor, who, being without immediate support, fell back before them and took up a position behind the Alberche. Sir Arthur was preparing to attack him, when Cuesta, who was an irritable man, too old for active service in the field, and said to be jealous of Sir Arthur Wellesley, whom some had proposed to place in supreme command of the Spanish as well as the British armies,

## 108 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

July  
27-28,  
1809

suddenly refused, and the opportunity of falling with superior forces upon Victor was lost. The French general, hearing of Sir Robert Wilson's presence at Escalona, retired ; but only for a short time, for Joseph now came forward to his support, and with a large French force soon appeared in front of a position which had been chosen and taken up for the Allies by Sir Arthur Wellesley at Talavera.

### BATTLE OF TALAVERA

*July 27th and 28th, 1809*

(See plan facing page 114)

This severely contested battle continued throughout part of two days, and consisted of three separate efforts on the part of the French to carry the Allied position.

The numbers engaged were :—

French, about 56,000, with 80 guns.

Allies: British (with some Germans), 22,000, with 30 guns ; Spanish, 34,000 with 70 guns. In cavalry the French were about 7,000 ; Allies, 10,000.

The Allied troops were drawn up as follows :—The Spaniards formed the right, occupying the town and environs of Talavera on the Tagus, having some olive and cork woods in their front concealing their position. Enclosures, walls, ditches, and felled trees made this part of the line almost unassailable, and the French, in consequence, merely threatened it throughout the battle, and did not decidedly attack it at all.

The British and Germans formed the centre and left, the left resting on a chain hills, beyond which,

separated by a rugged valley and at about half a mile's distance, was a mountain ridge, the Sierra de Montalban. July  
27-28,  
1809

Running down this valley, and then turning and passing along the whole front of the Allied position to the Tagus at Talavera, flowed a small stream called the Portina rivulet. This was fordable in many places, but ran in the upper part through a deep ravine.

The ground in advance of the Allied centre and left was rough, but comparatively open, and at about the point where the British right joined the Spaniards was an isolated mound crowned with an earthwork, on which some guns were placed.

Facing the Allied left on the French side of the Portina rivulet was an opposing range of hills, which the French seized directly they advanced.

Joseph, who had under him generals acquainted with the ground, and was anxious that the Allies should not have time to strengthen their position, did not stop to reconnoitre, or see how it was occupied—for which Napoleon subsequently censured him. His light troops came on so suddenly, on the afternoon of the 27th, that Sir Arthur, who had ridden in advance to observe the country, very narrowly escaped capture, and the enemy was only checked with difficulty and the loss of 400 men.

Before sunset a determined attack had been made upon the centre and left of the British position, and that part occupied by the Spaniards had been threatened, upon which several Spanish regiments—though not all, for others stood fast and firm—lost confidence, and fled towards the rear.

## 110 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

July  
27-28,  
1809

The struggle was severe and close upon the left, the French at one moment having gained the summit of the heights and nearly turned the Allied flank; but, before darkness had completely set in, the attack had been repulsed, and the enemy's broken troops had retired to their own side of the Portina stream, each force having lost nearly 1,000 men.

On the morning of the 28th the battle was again renewed, chiefly against Hill's division on the left, but all efforts to dislodge the British posted there failed; and having lost over 1,500 men in forty minutes, the French once more fell back, covered by their artillery.

For some hours hostilities were suspended. The day was intensely hot, and the troops suffered severely from thirst. Many soldiers of both armies drank, it is stated, amicably, during the truce, close to each other from the Portina stream, while the ammunition was being replenished and the wounded looked to.

The French held a council of war, in which Marshal Jourdan, the King's Chief of the Staff, advocated withdrawing to the Alberche and awaiting the result of Soult's operations on the Allied rear, arguing that if, at the first, when the Allies had not been, apparently, alive to the danger of their left being turned by the Sierra de Montalban, a turning movement had been carried out, it might have succeeded, but that now the opportunity for it had almost certainly passed away. In this view subsequent events showed that Jourdan was right, for Sir Arthur, fearing for his left, had sent troops to the Sierra, and moved up his cavalry

into the valley; so that when, in the afternoon, <sup>July 27-28, 1809</sup> Joseph determined, acting on the advice of Victor, to make a final effort to turn as well as take the left, he again failed, though he repulsed the cavalry, hampered by the ground, with loss.

At about 2 p.m. the attack was recommenced with great fury, not only against the left but against the centre. At one time a portion of the British force followed up the repulsed French columns too far, and, being in turn broken and driven back, was pursued closely by the enemy, and retired in disorder to the position.

This was the crisis of the battle of Talavera; the centre of the British line was, according to Napier, absolutely broken, and victory inclined towards the French. What happened now deserves special notice, and illustrates three points. First, the quickness and decision of Sir Arthur Wellesley; second, the result of a well-timed counter-attack; and third, the effect which one steady disciplined regiment may have on the battle-field, and upon a whole campaign.

Perceiving at once, before they were repulsed, the danger which the rash ardour of the pursuing British regiments would bring upon them, Sir Arthur had ordered down to their support a regiment from the hill, though at some risk. The splendid steadiness of this corps (the 48th) restored the day, and defeated the last French effort.

"It seemed," writes Napier, "as if it must be carried away by the retiring crowds; but, wheeling back by companies, it let them pass through the intervals, and then resuming its proud and beautiful

July  
27-28,  
1809

line, struck against the right of the pursuing enemy, plying such a destructive musketry, and closing with such a firm countenance, that his forward movement was checked."

This counter-stroke on the flank of the momentarily victorious French was decisive of the battle, and made the British strongest at the critical and most important point. The attacks against the left and remainder of the position were being, or had been, all repulsed, and the whole French army now fell back across the Alberche, three miles in rear, and from there, on the 29th, towards Madrid. Sir Arthur writes that he would have brought forward the Spaniards in the battle to attack the French columns on their left flank, but he dared not attempt it owing to their incapability of manœuvring.

After the contest had ceased, the grass which covered much of the field of battle, having become very dry from the excessive heat, took fire accidentally, and the flames, spreading, cruelly scorched numbers of the wounded.

The losses were very heavy—Allies about 6,000, French 9,000 ; 17 guns were taken from the latter. The Allies could not pursue, the British being exhausted and in want of food, and the Spaniards, in Sir Arthur's opinion, not sufficiently in hand.

The results of the battle may be said to have been more moral than material. The British had fought in a half-starved condition, and were unable to pursue on account of fatigue and want of food, for in the contest the brunt of the fighting had fallen almost entirely on them ; and with 22,000 they had

practically met the attack of 45,000—i.e. of more than double their numbers. July  
27-28,  
1809

Here, as at Vimiera and Corunna, the line, from its superiority of fire, had overthrown the dense French columns.

Napoleon's comments upon Joseph's plan of attack were: "When once you had resolved to deliver battle you should have done so with more unity and vigour"—in other words, that he should have massed more men opposite the one point he desired to carry, and pushed and supported the attack there more strenuously.

He did not use his "Reserve" at all, and with respect to this Napoleon says: "To be repulsed when one has 12,000 men in reserve who have not fired a shot, is to put up with an insult."

It would seem, certainly, that he should have made early in the battle a more decided and concentrated effort to force and turn the British left.

A "Reserve" is a force held back to be used at decisive points as occasion requires, and therefore, before an army is finally worsted, it should have been brought, at all events to some extent, into action. Sir Arthur Wellesley had scarcely any Reserve in the proper sense of the word in this battle, for his whole available British troops were not more than sufficient to occupy the front of the position, and the Spaniards he could not count upon with any confidence. This made his situation all the more difficult and critical, and the gallantry of the British infantry was so conspicuous at Talavera, that a French general (Jomini) bore



## 114 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

July  
28-31,  
1809

testimony that it “proved that it could dispute the palm with the best in Europe.”

The French, having now, from the experience of more than one contest, learnt the true quality of their enemy and its leader, never, it is said, afterwards approached the British with the confidence they had formerly felt.

The battle was a defensive one, but its result was decided by an *offensive* attack at the critical moment. “Talavera” forms a bar to the Peninsular medal, and a battle-honour for regiments engaged. In this battle the 29th Regiment captured two standards.


At its conclusion Sir Arthur could obtain no assistance for his wounded; and becoming indignant, refused firmly to stir one step further in advance. Writing on July 31st he says: “It is positively a fact, that during the last seven days the British army have not received one-third of their provisions, and that at this moment there are nearly 4,000 wounded soldiers dying in hospital from want of common assistance and necessaries, which any other country in the world would have given, even to its enemies. I positively will not move—nay, more, I will disperse my army—till I am supplied with provisions and means of transport, as I ought to be.”

Venegas, who was to have operated against Toledo and Madrid from the south, moved forward in so slow a manner that he bore with no weight upon the campaign, and it has been stated that secret instructions had been issued to him by his Government, which had thwarted those of Sir Arthur.



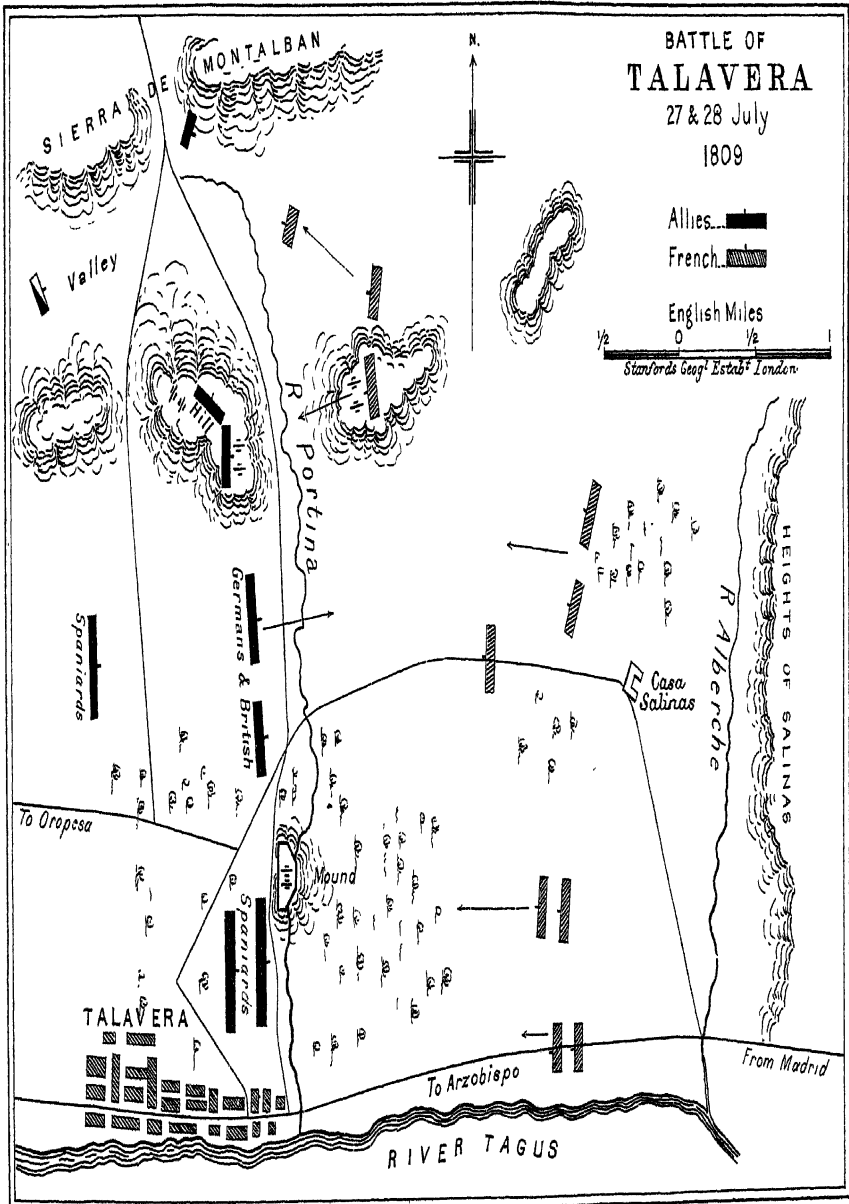


# BATTLE OF TALAVERA 27 & 28 July 1809

Allies... 

French... 

English Miles





These instances alone show in sufficiently strong light the difficulties in connection with the Spanish Government and commanders which Sir Arthur Wellesley had to contend with ; and he soon had a still more decided proof of the untrustworthiness of his allies, and one which nearly cost him his army. July.  
Aug.  
1809

On August 2nd, 1809,\* he became aware that the promise made by Cuesta to occupy the pass of Baños had not been fulfilled ; that he had only sent there a handful of men ; and that Soult, having *marched through the pass*, was now at *Plasencia in rear of the Allied army*.

This threatened danger caused Sir Arthur to face about ; and, ignorant of the strength of Soult, he marched to attack him, leaving Cuesta behind at Talavera, with the understanding that, if he retreated, he was to provide transport and bring away the wounded.

One of the most serious junctures in which the British army was at any time placed in the Peninsula was now impending, for not only was Soult's corps at Plasencia, but the two others (Ney's and Mortier's), which had been placed under his command, and of the position of which Sir Arthur was ignorant, were fast concentrating with him in the valley of the Tagus.

To understand this new situation of affairs, so critical for the Allies, we must turn for a moment to the movements of the French under Soult.

When the Emperor had placed the two corps of

\* Oman, in his *History of the War*, says August 3rd ; Soult was, at all events, at Plasencia on August 1st.

## 116 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

July-  
Aug.  
1809

Ney and Mortier under the command of Soult, he had told the latter to "concentrate"; and having (though at a distance in Austria), penetrated the probable movements of the Allies, had thus written: "Wellesley will most likely advance by the Tagus against Madrid; in that case pass the mountains, fall on his flank and rear, and crush him."

Soult received this letter on June 20th, 1809, and at once ordered Ney and Mortier to join him, and communicated his orders to Joseph. But the spirit of discord was now strong among the French commanders; Ney is said by some to have been unwilling to move, holding it imprudent to uncover Leon, and had in any case a long march before him; and Joseph, afraid of Venegas's corps to the south, called Mortier towards Madrid. Thus the concentration did not take place until after a long delay; and it was July 18th before the three corps—Soult, Ney, and Mortier, 50,000 strong—were in motion towards Salamanca. Thus, two days before the junction between Sir Arthur Wellesley and Cuesta at Oropesa (July 20th), these corps were on the march to unite; Soult became aware of the Allies having passed through Plasencia, and his cavalry posts moved towards the pass of Baños.

On July 22nd Joseph was made aware of this, and also of the presence of the Allies at Talavera. He ordered Soult to move upon Plasencia with speed, and calling in all his troops, except a small force left at Toledo to watch Venegas, marched in person to assist Victor against Sir Arthur Wellesley.

The result of his attack upon the Allied position at Talavera on July 27th and 28th, 1809, has been already mentioned; and from what we have said above, the advance of Soult with Ney and Mortier without difficulty through the pass of Baños, which Cuesta had failed to occupy as arranged, and his presence at Plasencia, is fully explained.

On August 3rd Sir Arthur Wellesley, who, as we have said, had faced about (and was now marching as he thought against the corps of Soult alone), reached Oropesa; and on the evening of that day, while he was still unconscious of the dangers which surrounded him, he learnt from captured French despatches that the enemy under Soult were in far greater strength than he had supposed; and that that marshal had already reached Naval Moral, thus cutting him off from one of his lines of retreat across the Tagus—viz. that by the bridge of Almaraz. He also learnt that Joseph was again advancing, and that Cuesta had determined to fall back in haste from Talavera. Sir Arthur now saw that but two alternatives were left open to him,—viz. to retire across the Tagus by the bridge of Arzobispo, and so reach the road through Truxillo and Merida before the French intercepted him; or to stand his ground, and, with an army depressed in spirit by long abstinence, fight two marshals superior to him in numbers, moving in combination against his front, his rear, and his line of retreat. The Spaniards were not to be depended upon, and Napier tells us that “the peril was now apparent to every soldier in the British ranks.” Under these circumstances



## 118 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

Aug. to  
Dec.  
1809

Sir Arthur determined to fall back, and on August 4th, 1809, the army crossed the bridge of Arzobispo, and moved towards Jaracejo. The Spaniards under Cuesta retreated by the same route, and thus the plans of the French for the destruction of the Allies were foiled, though their escape from a dangerous position was a narrow one.

During all these movements, Sir R. Wilson's handful of troops did all that was possible to harass Joseph. They advanced within twelve miles of Madrid, escaped thence with difficulty from the French, and got back to Portugal by the pass of Baños, where they had a sharp engagement with the latter's forces.

It is unnecessary to mention in detail any of the further movements of this campaign. The French made no effort to follow up the Allies, who had managed upon the retreat towards Jaracejo to destroy the bridge at Almaraz, and were ready to oppose the passage of the river there. Their commanders differed in opinion as to the plans to be adopted; and at length, satisfied with saving Madrid, they again separated their forces. It may be mentioned that the British wounded, abandoned by Cuesta when he retreated from Talavera, were well treated by the French.

Sir Arthur Wellesley held for a time his position near Jaracejo and Almaraz, but finding it in the end impossible to procure with certainty a sufficiency of either food or transport, he determined to remove his army towards Badajoz and trust no more to the Spaniards. Withdrawing his troops, towards

the end of December, 1809, through Merida to <sup>Dec.</sup> Badajoz, he went into cantonments there, and <sup>1809</sup> eventually marching northward, quartered them on the banks of the Agueda, between Almeida and Ciudad-Rodrigo, commencing at the same time in secret to fortify the country around Lisbon, endeavouring to make his hold upon that corner of Portugal secure by the construction of the *Lines of Torres Vedras*.

#### COMMENTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

When Sir Arthur Wellesley, at the opening of this campaign, meditated his offensive movement into Spain, three plans were open to him.

1. To operate through Elvas and Badajoz, making these fortresses his base, join with Cuesta south of the Tagus, cross that river with him, and then move towards Madrid.

2. To operate through Almeida and Ciudad-Rodrigo, making those fortresses his base, join with Beresford, and then move by Salamanca on Madrid.

3. To operate (as he did) through Plasencia, along the north bank of Tagus, join with Cuesta on that bank, and thus move towards Madrid.

The objections to the first plan were, that both armies would have the Tagus to cross after uniting; the bridges were few, and Victor might oppose their passage. Moreover, it would be necessary to leave strong detachments on the north bank to cover the roads to Lisbon; and the communication between Soult and Victor being open, Beresford's

## 120 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

corps, isolated at Ciudad-Rodrigo, would be endangered.

The objections to the second plan were, that it would completely separate the British from Cuesta, and that if the latter were attacked and defeated, an advance on Lisbon and Seville, and even the capture of those cities, could hardly be prevented.

The objections to the third plan were, that the junction of the British with Cuesta might be opposed by Victor, and rendered difficult. The line of march, also, along the northern bank of the Tagus, between the mountain spurs and the river, was confined and cramped; it also exposed the flank of the army to Soult, should he succeed in forcing the passes.

It was, as we have before mentioned, the fact that there were but two known passes, Perales and Baños, practicable for artillery, the belief that the Spaniards could and would hold these, and his false impressions as to the strength of Soult, that influenced Sir Arthur to adopt the third plan as the best.

But it may be asked, What definite end did Sir Arthur propose to obtain in this campaign, since it was not to be expected that he could hold his ground near Madrid *for any length of time* against the forces which the French could, sooner or later, bring against him? The answer is, that he designed to aid the Spaniards by attempting the recovery of the Spanish capital, if only for a short time, from the French. Madrid was not a strong city. The French, covering it at various points upon the south, were but 50,000; while he, Cuesta,

and Venegas, united, would be about 90,000. There was also a possibility of his being able to fall suddenly upon one corps of the French (Victor's), and inflict a defeat upon it. The capture of Madrid would have been a serious loss to the enemy, as it was the general dépôt of all the French armies ; and the temporary occupation of the city alone would have produced a great moral impression in the Peninsula.

Looking back on the campaign, the belief that Sir Arthur's plans would have been successful, had they not been marred by the circumstances we have described, seems fully justified. The opportunity of falling upon Victor with superior forces in his position behind the Alberche did actually present itself, but to all Sir Arthur's entreaties for an attack Cuesta was deaf; Victor was reinforced by Joseph, and the favourable chance passed away.

Had Victor been overwhelmed, and had Venegas co-operated energetically by the line of Toledo, Joseph must have retreated towards Madrid, and there is no reason to doubt that that city (which was weakly fortified, was by position badly adapted for defence, and which Napoleon had reduced in two days), would have fallen quickly to the Allies. Further, had Soult's strength been only that which Sir Arthur conceived it to be, and had Cuesta carried out his promises, there was every reason to suppose that the Spaniards would have been able to hold the mountain passes against the enemy, and prevent such a march as that which the French marshal was able to carry out.

## 122 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

The phases of the campaign, as they successively unfolded themselves, were of so extraordinary a nature that Sir Arthur Wellesley could hardly have anticipated them. He could scarcely have foreseen that Cuesta, in his folly and want of faith, would neglect the pass of Baños; or the extreme apathy of Venegas; or that a concentration and march, such as that of Soult with Ney and Mortier, could be effected without his knowledge and unopposed. That this concentration and this march *were* so effected must ever remain a fact difficult of satisfactory explanation, but it affords another lesson of the necessity for *incessant effort in obtaining information of the enemy's movements*.

Sir Arthur could scarcely credit the situation in which he found himself when he heard of Soult's strength and his position at Plasencia; and writing afterwards, he says: "*I did not think it possible that three French corps, under three marshals, could have been assembled at Salamanca, without the knowledge of the governor of Ciudad-Rodrigo, or of the Junta*" (*i.e.* the Government) "*of Castille, or that they could have penetrated into Estremadura without a shot being fired at them.*"

Speaking of Joseph's attack on the Allied position at Talavera, which brought on the battle at that point, Napier characterizes it as "a palpable, an enormous fault." Soult had clearly seen this, and had written to him in these words: "The most important results will be obtained, if your majesty

will *abstain from attacking* until the moment when the knowledge of my march causes the enemy to retrace his steps." Joseph, however, allowed himself to be over-persuaded by Victor, and attacked.

The marching of some of the British troops from Lisbon to join in the battle of Talavera affords a good example of what can be done upon occasion by highly trained men. These men of the Light Division, under General Craufurd [43rd, 52nd, and 95th (now Rifle Brigade)], marched, leaving but 17 stragglers behind, under a scorching sun and with insufficient food, the great distance of 62 miles in 26 hours,\* each soldier carrying over 50 pounds in weight, and after some previous days' hard marching. Though they arrived too late to join in the fight, they took the outpost duty immediately after reaching the battle-field. What they accomplished proved the value of the unceasing attention Craufurd paid to the details of marching in his division, as to which his orders were severely stringent.

The anxiety and disappointment which, in this campaign, the want of food and transport caused to Sir Arthur Wellesley, show the vital importance

\* Napier and Alison say 62 English miles in 26 hours. Sir W. Cope, in his *History of the Rifle Brigade*, says upwards of 50 miles in 25 hours. Oman, who visited this part of Spain, says 43 miles in 22 hours. These discrepancies, though, do not affect the fact that the march was one of the most extraordinary on record, and it is to be borne in mind that the Division had marched some distance the day before it started on this last effort, moved *beyond* the actual position at Talavera, and then took up the outposts, which may account to some extent for the various estimates of distance and time.

## 124 CAMPAIGN OF 1809 (2ND PERIOD)

of these matters even more strongly than did the delays and long-drawn-out columns in that of Sir John Moore.

As he was unable in a friendly country to take food by force, and could not get it by other means, he was compelled to abandon Spain and retire into Portugal. His army, though it fought bravely in a half-fed condition at Talavera, at length fell into a very bad state. He himself, writing shortly after that battle, says: "The soldiers lose their discipline and their spirit; they plunder even in the presence of their officers. The officers are discontented, and are almost as bad as the men; and with an army which a fortnight ago beat double their numbers, I should now hesitate to meet a French corps of half their strength."

One great cause why the French and Allied armies in this campaign both failed to achieve any result commensurate with the number of soldiers in the field was, that both were under a "divided command." Frequent changes of the head of an army, as in the campaign of 1808, or having more than one head, as in this campaign, are alike evils. In this case Sir Arthur Wellesley could not manage his independent ally Cuesta; Joseph could not manage his semi-independent marshals; and the marshals would not work in entire unison with one another, or with Joseph. Alluding to this jealous feeling and want of concord among the French marshals, Captain Lewis Butler, in *Wellington's Operations in the Peninsula*, writes, "Again and again, during the Peninsular War, we find the

same forces actively at work, nullifying the Emperor's combinations however carefully thought out, however scientifically planned."

Powerful alliances may, for political reasons especially, render a divided command an advantage upon the whole; but at the same time, in such a command, there is an inherent weakness.

This campaign furnishes a marked instance of the failure of a double line of operations.

Napier remarks, that experience proves, that without extraordinary good fortune some accident will happen to mar the combinations of armies operating by more than one line. Both armies in this campaign were advancing by a "double line." Joseph was attempting to combine with Soult; Wellesley and Cuesta (united) were attempting to combine with Venegas: and both the combinations in reality failed.

In operations of this kind, the divided portions of an army often find great difficulty in obtaining intelligence of each other's movements. Still, we shall see, in other campaigns in this war, instances of successful operations by more than one line, and we may mention that the Prussians operated successfully by more than one in the war with Austria in 1866, and in the war with France in 1870. In the recent war in South Africa we were operating by two lines—viz. from Cape Town, and from Durban, in Natal. Success depends largely upon the perfection of the preparations beforehand, the extent to which communication can be kept up, (which the field telegraph now facili-



tates), and the cordial and determined co-operation of all concerned.

The influence upon the operations of the topography of the country is very striking.

If the long chain of the Guadaramas had not existed, practicable at but two points for artillery, Sir Arthur Wellesley would never have thought of advancing up the Tagus, exposing his flank to Soult. Again, if the Tagus had been a fordable river, or bridged at many places, its character as an obstacle would have been entirely different.

As it was, when Sir Arthur Wellesley was at Oropesa on August 3rd, and heard that Soult was at Naval Moral, on the road to the boat bridge at Almaraz, he was placed in this position :—In his front and rear were the French ; on his right an almost impassable mountain range ; and on his left a river, to be crossed with artillery and baggage but at Arzobispo alone.

He could only retreat over the bridge there, or cut his way through the enemy. “We were in a bad scrape,” he writes, “and I really believe that if I had not determined to retire at the moment I did, all retreat would have been cut off for both.”

Again, if, after he had retired to Jaracejo, destroying on his way the bridge of Almaraz, the Tagus had been of a different character, the French could have easily crossed, and pursued immediately. But Sir Arthur says : “The possession of the bridge of Almaraz, and of the mountains between that point and the bridge of Arzobispo, protects the country behind the Tagus from Toledo nearly to

Abrantes, as the enemy cannot penetrate with cannon at any point between Almaraz and Toledo, and the passage of the river is nearly impracticable for an army between Almaraz and Abrantes."

It would be hardly possible to illustrate more completely that there can be no true comprehension of, or just criticism on, the military operations in any country, without a full knowledge of that country's topography.

The following extract from a letter of Sir Arthur Wellesley to Lord Castlereagh, written after he had retreated to Jaracejo, gives in very few words his opinion of the conduct of the Spaniards. "I have but little to add," he says, "to my public despatch of this date, which I hope will justify me from all blame in the eyes of his Majesty's Ministers, excepting that of having *trusted the Spanish general in anything.*"

For the victory of Talavera Sir Arthur Wellesley was created Viscount Wellington.

One advantage gained by the Allies in this campaign was, that Galicia was evacuated by the French in order to move down upon Sir Arthur.

## CHAPTER VII

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### CAMPAIGN IN PORTUGAL, 1810

#### MASSENA INVADES PORTUGAL—BUSACO—THE LINES OF TORRES VEDRAS

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THE experience gained in the Talavera campaign convinced Lord Wellington that but little assistance in freeing the Peninsula was to be obtained from the Spaniards. It became more evident to him day by day, that any success against the masses of the French must be a gradual one, and that he might possibly be driven, as Sir John Moore had been, to fall back towards the sea—his base.

His efforts were now directed to the raising and organizing of a larger force of Portuguese, to placing provisions and garrisons in fortified posts at Abrantes, Setuval, Peniché, etc., as well as in the frontier fortresses of Almeida and Elvas; and, above all, to the strengthening of the lines of Torres Vedras, covering Lisbon.

Cadiz and Gibraltar were the only points out of Portugal now held by the British.

To the few who knew of the existence of the fortifications about Torres Vedras—which we

shall briefly describe further on—they appeared to have been designed to protect Lisbon from a *coup de main*, and nothing more; but by Wellington himself they had always been regarded as the barrier beyond which the French could and should never advance. Events soon proved the correctness of his judgment; and his reputation was raised, by the selection and construction of these lines, to an unquestioned eminence.

Napoleon, having avenged Aspern by the brilliant victory of Wagram (July 6th, 1809), and humbled Austria in this battle, again turned his attention to the Peninsula, increasing his armies destined to be quartered in Spain to the very large total of 366,000 men.

From the time of Wellington's retreat into Portugal after Talavera in 1809 until June, 1810, no very important operations went on against the British, but events were rapidly preparing the way for them.

In January, 1810, Marshal Soult had collected a large force—about 70,000—near the passes of the Sierra Morena mountains, forced them, and subdued Seville with all the chief cities of Andalusia—excepting Cadiz, which place he besieged.

Napoleon in the meantime was assembling a large army for the invasion of Portugal from the direction of Salamanca, to be placed under the command of Massena, one of his most celebrated marshals, called, from his success in Germany and elsewhere, the “spoiled child of victory,” and the French were actively engaged in subduing the various Spanish provinces, with such success that

June  
1810

by June, 1810, they were masters of three-fourths of the kingdom.

This month of June, 1810, may be regarded as a most critical epoch in the affairs in the Peninsula. The British people had begun to despair of success, and a strong party in Parliament clamoured for the withdrawal of the British troops, so that the least serious reverse would have entailed their recall. It was, in fact, owing chiefly to the firmness and representations of Wellington himself, influencing the Government in England, that the struggle was still continued.

The positions of the contending armies were at this time :—

#### THE FRENCH

The *Army of the South*, under Soult, composed of the corps of Victor, Mortier, and Sebastiani, about 60,000 in Andalusia.

The *Army of the Centre*, under Joseph, about 24,000 around Madrid.

The *Army of Portugal*, under Massena, composed of the corps of Ney, Reynier, and Junot, and the reserve cavalry of Montbrun, about 80,000. This army could be reinforced by other troops, which were extended from Salamanca to the French frontier. Ney, Junot, and Montbrun's cavalry were at Salamanca ; Reynier in the valley of the Tagus, near Alcantara.

The remainder of the 366,000 men were spread over the various provinces.

Soult had been appointed by Napoleon Major-General of the armies in Spain under Joseph,\* as

\* Equivalent to the appointment of Chief of the Staff.

well as Commander of the Army of the South, and was, in reality, almost independent of Joseph. June  
1810

#### THE ALLIES

To meet the invasion of Portugal which was threatening from various quarters, it was necessary that the Allies should be somewhat widely distributed, and Wellington had posted them thus:—

The bulk of the British army, under his own immediate command, at Viseu, Celorico, Guarda, and Pinhel—headquarters being at Celorico; the cavalry along the valley of the Mondego, and some at Belmonte; and 4,000 men of the Light Division under Craufurd pushed out between the Rivers Coa and Agueda, watching Ciudad-Rodrigo. The strength in all nearly 25,000 men.

The remainder of the British (about 5,000), and some Portuguese, under Hill (about 5,000), at Abrantes and Portalegre, on the road towards Badajoz.

The bulk of the Portuguese regular troops, paid by England and commanded by British officers, at Thomar, as a reserve, and in the fortresses of Almeida, Elvas, &c.—nearly 30,000.

The Portuguese militia—21 regiments—to the North of the Douro; a somewhat greater number under command of Beresford at Setuval, at different points of the Alemtejo, and thrown out behind the Elga and the Ponsul,—nearly 30,000.

In order to secure supplies, depôts were established along the rivers,—viz. at Abrantes and near

June-  
July  
1810

Lisbon, on the Tagus ; at Figueras and Pena Cova, on the Mondego ; and at Oporto and Lamego on the Douro. Magazines of consumption were placed at Viseu, Celorico, Condeixa, Leirya, Thomar, and Almeida. Flying bridges were constructed on the Tagus and Zezere, near Abrantes ; and also over the Tagus at Vilha Velha. Roads were improved in the interior of Portugal, as far as possible, in order to assist the Allied communication ; for instance, the road from Abrantes by Thomar and Espinhal to the Mondego (connecting Hill, by a short route, with Wellington) ; and that on the left bank of the Tagus from Abrantes, by Vilha Velha, to Castel-Branco (connecting Hill with the advanced Portuguese militia on the Ponsul). A chain of posts by Guarda, Espinhal and Thomar to Abrantes was also established to secure the communication between Hill and Wellington.

Certain roads leading towards the Allied posts, such, for instance, as that from Castel-Branco over the mountains to Abrantes (by Sobriera Formosa), and that leading from Sabugal, by Belmonte, and along the Zezere to Thomar, were made more difficult to the enemy by breaking them up.

Signal telegraphs, of which a naval officer was in charge, were established from Lisbon to Abrantes and Almeida.

These preparations for defence should be carefully noticed.

In this position Wellington awaited the unfolding of the French plans, working all the time at

## MASSENA INVADES PORTUGAL 133

the lines of Torres Vedras, Craufurd being in-  
structed, on the approach of the French in any strength, to retire behind the Coa, and not to risk a serious action on the right bank.

June-  
July  
1810

Napoleon's plan of campaign was for Massena to invade Portugal from Salamanca, while Soult advanced on Badajoz and Elvas. The invasion of Massena was to be the real serious effort to drive the Allies back; but Soult also, after taking Badajoz and Elvas, was to co-operate by endeavouring to reach Lisbon from that direction.

Early in June, 1810, Massena commenced his operations by sending Ney across the Agueda to invest Ciudad-Rodrigo, while the corps of Reynier was kept in motion in order to perplex Wellington.

Craufurd fell back towards the Coa before Ney's force, which was six times stronger than his own, and Wellington, knowing that he would be powerless to prevent Ciudad-Rodrigo falling in the end, made no effort to relieve it. The place surrendered to the French on July 10th, 1810.

After the fall of this fortress Ney advanced, threatening Almeida; and Craufurd, anxious to delay its fall, remained on the right bank of the Coa dangerously long, in opposition (in spirit at all events) to the directions he had received from Wellington. The result was that he was almost surrounded by the larger force of Ney, and obliged to draw off his troops hastily over the Coa on July 24th, 1810, by one narrow bridge, suffering serious loss and very nearly losing his entire force,



Aug.  
1810

which was composed of the pick of the British Light Division. Sir Harry Smith writes as to this: "During the Peninsular War there was never a more severe contest. The 43rd lost 17 officers and 150 men. The 95th (Rifles) 10 officers and 140 men. The bridge was literally piled with the dead, and they made breastworks of the bodies." —*Autobiography of Sir Harry Smith*, edited by G. C. Moore-Smith, M.A., 1902.

Wellington now withdrew all his own troops to the left bank of the Mondego, except one division posted at Guarda to keep open the communication with Hill and watch the road from Almeida, while the militia in the north harassed Massena's rear, and captured Senabria.

Until August 15th Massena made no further decided movements, being anxious to hear what Soult was accomplishing in the south before he entered farther into the campaign.

He then (August 15th, 1810) invested Almeida with Ney's corps, and the place capitulated on the 28th.

Both the frontier fortresses of Ciudad-Rodrigo and Almeida were now in Massena's hands, and Reynier having been brought up to join him, he moved forward. On August 16th he had concentrated his troops thus (see Map IV., facing page 148):—

Junot, with the artillery and cavalry, at Pinhel.

Ney at Macal.

Reynier at Guarda.

From these points he put his three corps in motion for Viseu.

Massena's main body entered Viseu September 21st, 1810, but the artillery was in rear, and did not arrive till the 23rd. <sup>Sept. 1810</sup>

Wellington had fallen back before the French advance, by the *left* bank of the Mondego, directing Hill to join him as soon as he was certain that Reynier had moved northwards; and also ordering up some British and Portuguese troops who were at Thomar under General Leith.

Proclamations had some time before been issued to the inhabitants of Portugal by the Portuguese Government, at the instance of Lord Wellington, directing them, upon the French approach, to lay waste their fields, break down their bridges and mills, destroy their crops, and retire within the lines of Torres Vedras. It was hoped that by this means the country would be turned into an inhospitable desert for the French, affording no sustenance for man or beast.

Massena, having received his artillery, advanced along the right bank of the Mondego by Martagoa towards Coimbra, and Wellington, having observed his line of march, fell back along the left bank behind the River Alva.

The road by which Massena was moving approaches, at a few leagues north of Coimbra, the Sierra of Busaco. This sierra rises to some 250 feet above the surrounding slopes, which overhang the right bank of the Mondego.

At Martagoa, close to the River Criz, one of the affluents of the Mondego, the road branches off into five other roads leading by different directions towards Coimbra. Of these, three afford the only

Sept.  
1810

practicable routes over the Sierra of Busaco; a fourth, a poor road, leads westward, over the mountains of Caramula, and by the Boyalva Pass to Sardao, turning the sierra, and striking (at Sardao) the road from Oporto to Coimbra; the fifth turns the sierra by the right, passing the Mondego near Pena Cova, but exposed for a long distance to the fire of guns on the Sierra of Busaco.

It was determined by Wellington to endeavour to bar Massena's path at the Sierra of Busaco, in order to raise the spirits of his own soldiers and of the people of Portugal, and also to gain time to withdraw his magazines from Coimbra and Condeixa, and aid the Portuguese peasantry in carrying out the destruction of the crops and laying waste the country. This sierra offered an excellent position, and Hill and also Leith (from Thomar) having now arrived, Wellington, on September 26th 1810, drew up the army upon it, with the exception of a few troops, and the cavalry who were posted on the Oporto road, south of Sardao, watching the left. He also directed some Portuguese militia to move from Lamego upon Sardao and the Boyalva Pass, to prevent his being turned by that road, but this they did not carry out in time. The road by Pena Cova it was unnecessary to guard, from its exposure to artillery from the sierra.

Massena came up on the 26th, and thinking that the Allies were weaker than they were, tried to force the position.

## BATTLE OF BUSACO

Sept. 27,  
1810*September 27th, 1810*

(See plan facing page 138)

In this battle the Allies numbered about 50,000, the French about 70,000.

The mountain ridge of the Sierra Busaco on which Wellington drew up his troops afforded a strong position most difficult to carry even by a force very superior in strength. The Allied right was above Pena Cova, with Portuguese beyond that river; the left (Cole and some Portuguese) near the road to Milheada; between, across the roads to Coimbra, stretched the divisions of Leith, Picton, Spencer, and Craufurd—the last in advance of the convent—and a Portuguese division. The cavalry held the Coimbra road. In front of the position the mountainous country was intersected by watercourses and deeply wooded ravines, one of which separated the two armies.

The French attacked in five columns—three under Ney from a point about opposite to the convent, and two under Reynier from St. Antonio de Cantara, towards the British right; Junot's corps being in reserve. These columns ascended the heights under great difficulties with determined bravery, and suffering severe loss from the grape and musketry fire of the defenders.

At one time Reynier's troops actually reached the summit of the ridge, and that part of the position seemed lost, but they were shortly afterwards repulsed and driven down the slope.

On the Allied left a decisive charge of 1,800

Sept.  
27-28,  
1810

British bayonets, ordered by Craufurd, at the moment the French neared the crest, put an end to all the attempts on that part of the position.

This battle was, in short, a hand-to-hand fight in which great bravery was shown on both sides, and in it, as in other battles which we have already described, the superiority of the line over the column, when the line is composed of determined and cool troops, was once more illustrated.

The Allied loss was about 1,300; the French nearly 5,000.

“Busaco,” as a bar to the Peninsular medal and a battle-honour, commemorates the day.

The reasons why Sir Arthur Wellesley made this stand at Busaco are more fully explained further on in his own words.

The effect of it was to dispel the despondent feeling which had been caused both in England and in the Peninsula by the retreat towards the lines of Torres Vedras in the previous year; it gave the Portuguese also confidence in themselves, and increased their trust in Sir Arthur Wellesley as a leader.

The day following the battle, September 28th, Massena discovered the road by the Boyalva Pass and Sardao, which passed round the left of the Allied position, and in the night made towards the pass, and finding it unoccupied, got through it. By a mistake, the Portuguese to occupy it had taken a too circuitous route viâ Oporto, and so were too late to forestall the French. Thus Massena had gained the Oporto-Coimbra road, and so secured the

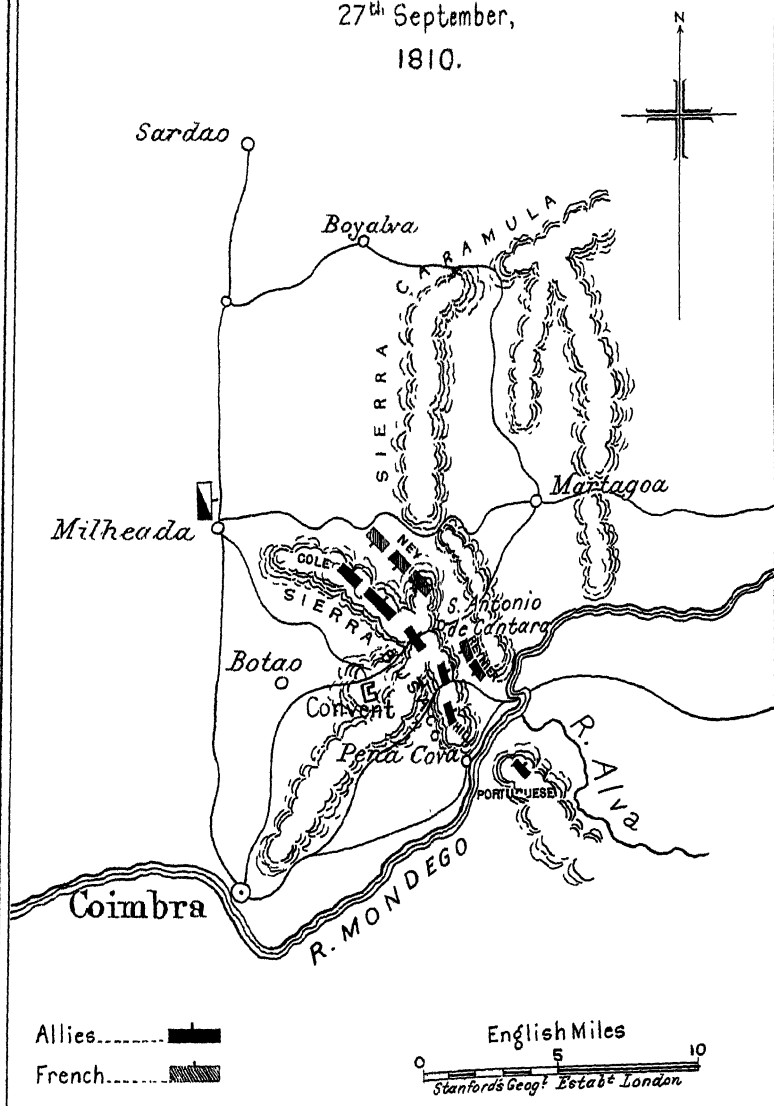




# BATTLE OF BUSACO

27<sup>th</sup> September,

1810.







advantage of being able to turn Wellington's position on the Busaco heights.
 Oct. 10,  
1810

Wellington then abandoned the heights, and retired by Coimbra, Pombal, and Leirya to the lines of Torres Vedras. Massena followed, sacking Coimbra and forcing occasional rearguard actions upon the Allies; and found himself on October 10th, 1810, face to face with the formidable works of Torres Vedras, which Wellington had erected to defend Lisbon, he having up to that time never even heard of their existence.

He now saw a barrier in his path which struck him with such astonishment that he retired, and did not come forward again for two days, when he cautiously reconnoitred the Allied position. The lines of Torres Vedras consisted of three great lines of defence. To form the first or outer one, a tract of country, thirty miles in length, extending from Alhandra on the Tagus, where gunboats aided in the defence, across by Torres Vedras to the sea, had been fortified with numerous redoubts and bristled with guns. This country, by nature most formidably strong, had been made stronger by scarping the mountains, damming up the rivers, forming inundations, and breaking up roads; inside this barrier, eight miles in rear, was a second and still stronger line; and behind this, around Lisbon, an intrenched camp: the defences in all consisting of some 150 redoubts, on which were mounted 600 cannon.

Some idea of the scale upon which these works had been constructed may be formed from the fact that 10,000 peasants, relieved weekly, had been

Nov.  
1810

employed upon them for a long time. Across the lines led the only roads by which the French could approach Lisbon. Five practicable for artillery crossed the first line, and four the second line, and these were defended by every kind of obstacle. Signal posts had been established on the principal heights, and the nature of the country was such that, while behind the lines communication from one end to the other was easy for the defenders, a ridge of mountains to the north (the Baragueda) divided an army facing the right and left extremities of the lines by a formidable natural obstacle.

The position of Massena was now as gloomy as it had before seemed hopeful. For one month, extended along the front of the lines, he sought in vain to find a practicable entrance; and during it the Portuguese militia and peasantry closed upon his rear, destroyed his magazines, and forced him to seek for sustenance by dispersing his army over the half-deserted country. During this time he sent a messenger (General Foy) to Paris, imploring Napoleon to order reinforcements to his succour, and in November made an effort to pass across the Tagus; but Hill watched the river so closely that he found it impossible. He then withdrew to Santarem, Alcanhete, Thomar, and Punhete.

It is only due to those officers of Engineers who, under Wellington's general instructions, planned, traced and supervised the famous lines of Torres Vedras which thus foiled Massena, to say that chief among them was Colonel John (afterwards Sir John) Jones, who subsequently wrote the first history of the war in

Spain (in 1814) and Lieutenant-Colonel (after-wards Sir Richard) Fletcher, who was subsequently killed at the assault of St. Sebastian. Wellington now took up a position at Cartaxo, Alcoentre, and along the Rio Mayor, leaving a small force in the lines, and the two armies remained in presence four months (which takes us into the year 1811), the policy of Wellington, who was well supplied himself from Lisbon and the sea, being not to lose his own men in any engagement, but to reduce his enemy by famine.

Nov.-  
Dec.  
1810

During these operations the corps of Mortier, sent by Soult towards Badajoz, and watched by Hill's force, had done nothing of importance, but the French had taken several more of the Spanish strongholds, including Tortosa.

#### COMMENTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

The position taken up by the Allied army in Portugal, in order to await the French invasion, has been so fully described in the preceding pages, and the different roads, etc., by which the armies operated put down with so much detail, because an examination into this campaign in these particulars is both interesting and instructive.

The French could have invaded Portugal by several different lines:—

1. From the north, crossing the River Douro, as Soult had attempted in 1809.
2. From some point between the Douro and the Tagus rivers, either from Ciudad-Rodrigo on the northern, or from Coria on the

southern, side of the chain of the Guadarama.

3. From the south of the River Tagus, between it and the Guadiana (*e.g.* from Badajoz).

The greatest danger was to be apprehended from the directions of Ciudad-Rodrigo in the north and Badajoz in the south; both because it would be an object to the French to gain these fortresses, and because the roads past them were the best for an invading army. *All points*, however, had to be watched, and were so.

The dispositions of Wellington were such, that while a portion of the Portuguese militia observed the first of the above lines, he himself, stretching from Viseu to Guarda and Belmonte, and with Beresford's Portuguese militia about the Elga and Ponsul, observed the second; and Hill, about Abrantes and Portalegre, the third.

The reserves occupied a central position at Thomar, and the arrangements as to bridges, roads, chains of posts, etc., mentioned as having been made to increase the facility of the Allied communications and impede the movements of the French, left nothing undone which, under the circumstances, was possible to ensure security from surprise and hamper the enemy. Wellington had an *interior* position with regard to the French, and in two marches could count on concentrating over 35,000 men, not including men in garrison, etc., towards Almeida—or at Guarda, (by uniting his own troops with the militia north of the river, or the Portuguese from Thomar); and about 30,000 towards Badajoz (by uniting Hill's force

with the militia in that neighbourhood, and towards the Elga and Ponsul); and as the line of invasion became pronounced, the troops from Thomar and reinforcements from England could be ordered up.

Hill and the militia along the Ponsul had a very responsible duty to perform in guarding the line of the Tagus, for it can be seen that *if* the French could force their way past them before Wellington could come from the north, they could interpose between the latter and Lisbon.

Of the different lines of invasion above alluded to as open to the French, the first had been tried by Soult, who had found it difficult and failed. The third was now about to be tried by Soult in aid of Massena's movements. Massena's choice therefore almost necessarily narrowed itself to the second, and to a selection between the lines to the north and south of the chain of the Guadarama. To have advanced by both of these would have needlessly weakened his strength.

That to the north was the nearer to his position at Salamanca, and the most direct. To operate by the southern he must cross the Guadarama chain by the passes of Baños or Perales, exposing the flank and rear of his line of march to annoyance from the Allies. The roads also to the south of the mountains were known from the experience of Junot to be very bad. Weighed against these disadvantages was the fact that an advance from this direction (*e.g.* from Coria) would have enabled communication to be kept up with Joseph at

Madrid, and with Soult, by Almaraz and Alcantara. Still, a consideration of all the drawbacks to the southern line fully accounts for Massena's adoption of that through Ciudad-Rodrigo and Almeida.

But after Massena, following this line, had secured the strongholds of Ciudad-Rodrigo and Almeida, and driven in the Allies from their vicinity, he had again the opportunity of choosing, from out of some three or four directions, the best one for his advance.

The existence of the long mountain ridges in continuation of the Sierra Estrella, stretching from Guarda towards Lisbon, and over which the roads were few, bad, and easily defended, almost forced an army approaching the Portuguese capital from the direction of Almeida to select which side of the ridge it will move by, and then adhere to it.

Massena might have tried to force the Sierra Estrella near Guarda, and advance down the Zezere Valley; but the road was broken up and carefully watched, and the Allied position strong.

He might have advanced down the left bank of the Mondego, but the road passed over mountains, and was described to Massena by some Portuguese of position as being a far worse one than it in reality was, although Napier implies that he would really have done more wisely to have taken that road.

He therefore determined to move by the right bank of the Mondego, through Viseu and Coimbra.

When Massena first arrived in front of the Allied position at Busaco, he might then have turned it as he did subsequently on the 28th, and without

## COMMENTS ON THE CAMPAIGN 145

any greater risk of loss to his army ; but he was unaware of the existence of a practicable road over the mountains at this point until after the battle of Busaco, when the unfortunate nature of his position made him search carefully for any outlet from it.

To gain information regarding all the roads and paths in an enemy's country is impossible without much exertion and running great danger; but the operations of this campaign show that sometimes hardly any sacrifice is too great to make for it.

Wellington has been criticised for having fought the battle of Busaco and lost men, when he meant eventually to retreat within the lines. What he himself says on this point is interesting:—

*To RIGHT HONOURABLE W. W. POLE.*

*October 4th, 1810.*

“I should have been inexcusable if, knowing what I did, I had not endeavoured to stop the enemy there ; and I should have stopped him entirely if it had not been for the blunders of the Portuguese general commanding in the north, who was prevented by a small French patrol from sending Trant by the road by which he was ordered to march. If he had come by that road—*i.e.* by Sardao and the Boyalva Pass—the French could not have turned our position, and they must have attacked us again ; they could not have carried it, and they must have retired. That which has since happened shows that, if not turned, I could have



maintained it without loss of importance, and that, if turned, I could retire from it without inconvenience. It has likewise removed an impression which began to be very general, that we intended to fight no more, but to retire to our ships; and it has given the Portuguese troops a taste for an amusement to which they were not before accustomed, and which they would not have acquired if I had not put them in a very strong position."

The political as well as the military situation made it, in fact, of importance to give battle at this time if a favourable opportunity offered. The battle of Busaco, writes Napier, "was forced upon him [Wellington] by events, and was in fine a political battle." He adds, too, that the changes in Government policy in England which might have followed upon any reverse made him determine to fight no more than was necessary, otherwise he might have attacked Massena after he turned towards the Boyalva Pass; but at this time "the loss of a single brigade might have caused the English Government to abandon the contest altogether."

It is probable that such considerations, which no leader can wisely ignore, made him wish to avoid a second battle, unless he could feel that he was attacking to great advantage; but his despatches show that, from uncertainty as to Massena's real intentions, he could not feel this.

He writes that, late on the 28th, he saw French troops moving to their rear, and passing the hills between the Sierra and Martagoa. He was doubtful,

however, of their object and of the direction they might take later on—whether to right or left. He believed that Sardao would be held by the Portuguese; and darkness was approaching.

So, during that night, in order to be closer to the Oporto-Coimbra road, he determined to move down from the Sierra. By the morning of the 29th he had abandoned it, and gone himself to Fornos, whence he writes to Hill, “We do not know which way they have turned,” and tells him to watch his right.

Thus, while still uncertain, for the reasons explained, of Massena’s position, he had withdrawn from the Sierra. It is, therefore, clearly not the case that while upon it he either saw or knew (as some have implied) that Massena was certainly turning his left flank, yet declined the opportunity of attacking him to advantage.

The secrecy with which the construction of the lines of Torres Vedras was carried on appears almost inexplicable. It says much for the activity of Wellington’s posts, and the patriotism of the Portuguese, without which not even the death penalty held over all who communicated with the enemy could have prevented some intelligence of their existence reaching the French.

The ability with which Hill aided Wellington in the operations of this campaign,—now closely watching Reynier; now hurrying by forced marches towards Wellington (thus reaching him in time for the battle of Busaco); now preventing Massena

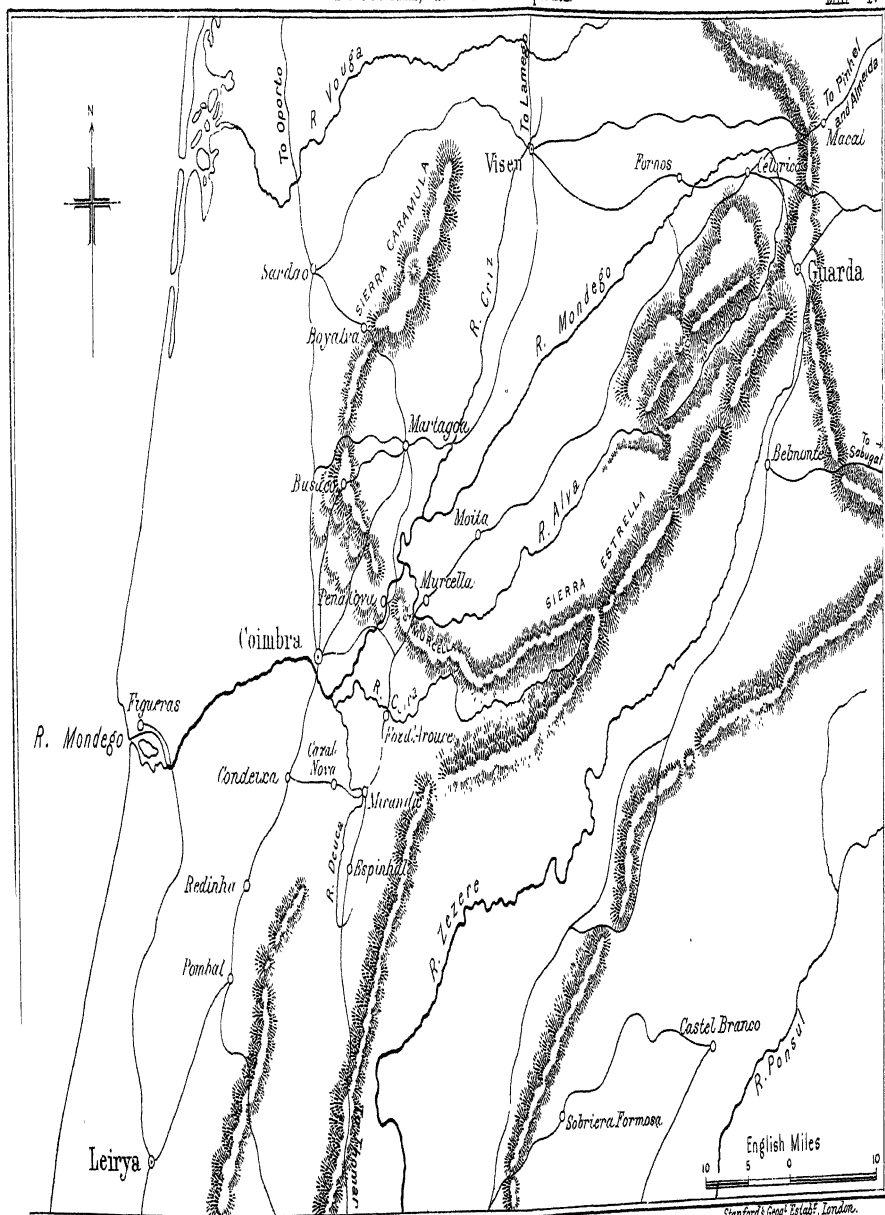
from effecting a passage over the Tagus into the fertile districts of the Alemtejo,—have always been much praised. Promptitude and daring in action, combined with a readiness to subordinate his personal operations to the furtherance of Wellington's general plan, especially marked the character of Hill, rendering him conspicuously a model for soldiers. It is most interesting, too, to read Wellington's remarks upon Craufurd's error in remaining too long on the right bank of the Coa.

“I had positively desired him not to engage in any affair on the other side of the Coa, and I repeated my injunction that he should not engage in an affair on the right of the river, in answer to a letter in which he told me that he thought the cavalry could not remain there without the infantry. . . . You will say, if this is the case, why not accuse Craufurd? I answer, because, if I am hanged for it, I cannot accuse a man who I believe has meant well, and whose error is one of judgment and not of intention; and indeed I must add, although my errors, and those of others also, are visited heavily upon me, that is not the way in which any, much less a British army, can be commanded.”—*Supplementary Correspondence of the Duke of Wellington; Letter to the Honourable W. Pole, Celorico, July 31st, 1810.*

Soult, as we have seen, made no efficient attempt in the campaign to aid Massena. Some writers have accused him of jealousy of that marshal,







Stanford's Geog. Inst. London.



but possibly the siege of Cadiz, the pacifying of Andalusia, and the quelling the guerilla bands, gave him, as he asserted, so much to do that he was unable to accomplish more.

The value to an army acting on the defensive of such works as those of Torres Vedras is well illustrated. These lines had almost all the advantages of perfect defensive works. They were strong by nature and art, permitted the holders of them to move out freely, had their flanks secure, a good communication for the defenders in rear, and obstacles in front which much interfered with the enemy's attacking them. They saved Portugal, and turned the scale of war against the French.

So, at the end of the year 1810, the contest in the Peninsula was thus balanced :—

The French had succeeded in confining the British to one corner of Portugal; they had *captured Ciudad-Rodrigo and Almeida*; had subdued almost all Spain with the exception of Cadiz (which still held out) and Badajoz; and could also draw large reinforcements from France.

On the other hand, they had not driven Wellington *out* of Portugal, and the English Government and people, aroused by the victory of Busaco and the check to Massena, were more inclined to prosecute the war.



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